

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The Impact of T.S. Eliot on the English Drama
of his Time. A Study of the Years 1919 - 55.

A Thesis submitted

by

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for

The Degree of M.A.

May 1956.

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Abstract of a Thesis

"The Impact of T.S.Eliot on the English
Drama of his Time. A Study of the Years 1919-55"

Presented by

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For the M.A. in English

The aim of this thesis is to determine the nature and value of Eliot's contribution to the development of drama in England in the first half of the twentieth century. An attempt is made to estimate the force of Eliot's impact on the English drama of his time by a critical analysis of the essential nature of the drama written before and after his entry upon the dramatic scene, and by an estimate of the fundamental changes effected by his work in the nature of this drama, and in dramatic outlook and technique.

Chapter I is a study of the main trends in English drama from the heritage of Ibsen in England in which Eliot's work is reviewed as a possible outcome of the drama which preceded it. Chapter II traces the development of Eliot from poet into dramatist, and involves an examination, with particular reference to Eliot's own work, of the essential difference between the poetic drama and the dramatic poem. In Chapter III the nature and originality of Eliot's drama is discussed, and his plays are criticised in detail. Chapter IV is an attempt to formulate Eliot's dramatic theory from his critical ^{opinions, and to relate this theory to the principal dramatic} theories of this century. Chapter V is a study of the work written after Eliot, indicating the primary effects of Eliot's impact, exhibiting any evidence

of direct influence, and looking back to the findings of the first chapter. The conclusion outlines the progress of development in brief and summarises the achievement. A select book-list is appended.

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PREFACE

It may well be thought that a more obvious title for any study of Eliot's drama in relationship to that of his contemporaries would be "The Impact of T.S. Eliot on the English Poetic Drama of his Time", and, indeed, this thesis inevitably deals chiefly with the development of the verse drama in England. However, both in the title of my work, and, I trust, in my approach to this subject, I have deliberately avoided insisting upon a distinction which Eliot himself vigorously rejects. The ascendancy of the prose drama in the theatre of this century has resulted in the unfortunate association of the term 'poetic drama' with matter for the study or the consciously appreciative audience of the small Arts Theatre, - in short, with that "highbrow effect which is so depressing".¹ The whole of Eliot's dramatic writing, both practical and theoretical, is directed towards the destruction of this fallacy and the reinstatement of poetry as the natural medium of language in the drama, and it is certainly

1. T.S. Eliot 'Euripides and Professor Murray', Selected Essays, p.60.

not for his critic to betray the dramatist's cause. Eliot is a man writing in the theatre and for the theatre, and he himself would surely be the first to demand that his work be viewed against the background of the theatre in general.

Since I have studied Eliot in relationship to contemporary English drama as a whole, the number of plays actually referred to in my text represents only a fraction of those which have been read. This applies particularly to the prose drama - it has been impossible, within the scope of this thesis, to discuss at length even the prose drama of value, and, in clearing the ground, a mass of material has been sifted which receives no mention in the text - much of it, indeed, closely approximating to rubbish. A more serious limitation has necessarily been imposed on a detailed comparison of the drama before and after Eliot, alleviated, I trust, by the fact that I have attempted to evaluate the essential difference in the nature, outlook, and technique of the drama written before and after the thirties, and have indicated significant points of comparison.

It will be noted that, in Chapter I, I have traced the main trends in English drama before Eliot to the appearance of The Rock in 1934. The reason is that, except, as I have noted¹ in the work of Auden and

1. See Chap.V, pp. 354 ff.

Isherwood, I find no evidence of any significant influence from the early poetry and Sweeney Agonistes on the drama written before The Rock.

A select book-list is printed at the end of the thesis. It has been necessary to confine this strictly to work of essential relevance, and there is therefore only an indication of the vast amount of lesser dramatic works and of periodical articles and reviews which have been examined.

I am gratefully indebted to Mr. E. Martin Browne for much stimulating discussion and helpful suggestion, and also to the officials of the Library of the British Drama League and the British Museum.

CHAPTER I

The Main Trends in English Drama at the Coming of Eliot

The favoured belief that the true artist is born, and not made, is fundamentally justified. Nevertheless, no genuine critical evaluation can afford to underestimate the influence of the circumstances of this birth on artistic development.¹ We must therefore examine Eliot's work in relationship to these circumstances, and estimate how far it is a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of the drama in this century, to what extent his genius is self sufficient, outstripping by the power of its originality the limitations of the prevailing dramatic trend, and what modifications have been effected in the exploitation of this genius by the environment of his age. We must trace the stream of the drama in the early part of the century changing, growing, developing, leading on

1. A dominant idea in the criticism of Matthew Arnold. See 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', Essays in Criticism, First Series, 1895, p.5. "for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment."

to a phase at which Eliot's work might be possible, only after which can we measure the length of the progressive stride taken by Eliot himself.

Looking back to the nineteenth century, we find that drama in England had fallen on hard times. The poets were furnishing a great body of plays doomed to ultimate failure in the living theatre. In order to appreciate fully the reason for this failure we must look deeper than at their tendency to write in an outworn convention. The majority of the nineteenth century poet dramatists were not successful in that they apparently did not comprehend the essential organic relationship between poetry and drama in the genuine poetic play. They did not realise every element of form as an aspect of dramatic concept,¹ and consequently they failed to work simultaneously in terms of character, action, setting and language for the objective substantiation of the underlying dramatic idea. Furthermore, the rhythms of their lines had lost that compelling vitality which essentially depends upon a close relationship with the rhythms of everyday speech.

1. A main tenet of Abercrombie's critical theory. A convenient reference is L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', 1912, English Critical Essays, twentieth century, selected by P.M. Jones, 1933.

As a result of these fundamental errors, their plays are heavily static with stiff, exalted language divorced from character and from life. Poetry is frequently superfluous and decorative rather than functional; it is in fact poetry which is not genuinely dramatic. Moreover, the further failure of most of the poetic dramatists at this time to acknowledge the imperative objectivity of the drama has its serious consequences in a fatal unwillingness to let presentation speak for itself.¹ Natural dramatic development is either clogged by clumsy exposition, or stultified by idiosyncratic awareness in character made to bear the burden of the poet's commentary. This is proof of an inability to realise that, in true poetic drama, the initial concept is completely projected into the ultimate form; the idea is embodied in and replaced by the drama itself.

Meantime, while the drama of the poets was inevitably moving towards the study rather than the stage, on the stage itself we find theatre claiming the title of drama by courtesy alone. The standard of plays had been reduced to the level of the box-office success. Tragedy and comedy had degenerated to the unnatural sensationalism and stock situation of melodrama and farce. The need for

1. See Chap. II, pp. 99-101.

a resurgence of imaginative integrity was fast becoming desperate. As early as the sixties there was some recognition of this need. In Caste¹ we find Robertson attempting to revitalise the drama to a closer approach to realism and a greater seriousness of purpose. Judged absolutely, his play is poor. The moral issue is over-emphasised, and its exposition is marred by melodramatic flourishes and cheap sentimentality. Nevertheless, there is here an acknowledgement of the necessity for a drama in contact with actual life and capable of dealing with real life problems.

However, we must look outside England for the chief instigation of her dramatic redemption. In the eighties the introduction of Ibsen's plays into this country was begun mainly through the translations of William Archer. The impact of this introduction can scarcely be overestimated, but the English adoption of the Norwegian dramatist is marked by a peculiar and regrettable limitation of appreciation. The English theatre fastened upon what are generally termed by critics of Ibsen as the "social" plays, that is plays such as The Pillars of Society,² A Doll's House,³ Ghosts⁴ and

1. T.W. Robertson, Caste, 1867.

2. H. Ibsen, The Pillars of Society, 1875-7.

3. H. Ibsen, A Doll's House, 1878-9.

4. H. Ibsen, Ghosts, 1881.

An Enemy of the People,¹ and, in doing so, chose only one, and that the least representative, of the three sections into which Ibsen's work naturally falls. The earlier poetic plays, including the tremendous Brand² and Peer Gynt,³ were passed over, and the later, highly symbolic drama from The Wild Duck⁴ to When We Dead Awaken⁵ apparently met with equal indifference. Thus, with fearful short-sight, the English theatre of the nineties overlooked completely the poetry of its greatest contemporary poetic dramatist. For poetic drama, as Abercrombie points out, is not merely a matter of making one's characters speak in verse.⁶ The ultimate form is only a symbol of a primary imaginative intensification. Every element of form, and not language alone, must be "in the scale" of the "conceptual poetry".⁷ In his early poetic drama Ibsen

1. H. Ibsen, An Enemy of the People, 1882.

2. H. Ibsen, Brand, 1865.

3. H. Ibsen, Peer Gynt, 1867.

4. H. Ibsen, The Wild Duck, 1883-4.

5. H. Ibsen, When We Dead Awaken, 1897-9.

6. This precept recurs throughout Abercrombie's critical work, and is fully developed in 'The Function of Poetry in Drama', 1933.

7. 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.256.

carried through the substantiation of this "conceptual poetry" into every aspect of the ultimate form, including its verbal expression. In his later work the underlying concept remains the concept of genuine poetic drama imaged in action, setting and character, though his characters do not openly "talk verse".¹ These characters are in "the scale" of the "conceptual poetry",² they have "undergone a certain powerful simplification and exaggeration"³ which enables them at once to be themselves and to stand as a generic representative of a recurrent human truth. Ibsen's characters "are poetry",⁴ and, indeed, we sometimes feel that it is a "wrench for them not so to utter themselves",⁵ but, in an attempt to point the essential relationships between poetic drama and contemporary existence, the dramatist has modified their natural poetic utterance to a pregnant, symbolic prose. It remains for Eliot to take the further step of adapting poetic utterance to the demands of contemporary living.

1. op. cit., p.255.

2. op. cit., p.256.

3. op. cit., p.254.

4. op. cit.

5. op. cit.

The fact remains that the English theatre at this time restricted Ibsen's imaginative experience to the small group of "problem" plays, with their tendency to concern with specific and limited moral issues. However, despite the unfortunate implications of this restriction, it was through the influence of the foreign dramatist that English drama regained its capacity for serious thought and its self respect. This stream of life blood flowing into the drama joined with the work of Henry Arthur Jones who, throughout his lifetime, fought consistently and vigorously to establish the serious problem play on the English stage.¹ In Saints and Sinners,² the handling of the moral issues, and of their embodiment in dramatic conflict, is frequently clumsy, especially by comparison with Ibsen's superb fusion of social and human significance. The play is marred by an exaggerated contrast between the forces of good and evil - there is too much of saintliness and sinning and too little of human reality - and by a potently melodramatic style in the "yes, my little bird,

1. Not only through his dramatic writings, but also by a campaign of lectures, essays, speeches etc.

2. H.A. Jones, Saints and Sinners, 1884.

you're in the trap",¹ and "spare my poor child"² tradition. Letty's death scene would certainly have done little Willie³ credit. In spite of its faults, however, Saints and Sinners, supported by a lengthy list of plays of serious content, illustrates the dramatic integrity of a writer who persisted untiringly in his life-long struggle to reclaim for the stage the themes of religion, morals, and ethics, and to strengthen the drama in its right to "press on and possess itself of the whole of human life".⁴

Immediately upon Jones, and closely associated with him in dramatic aim and technique, comes Arthur Wing Pinero. It is difficult for us, in an age in which ~~religion~~ ^{realism} has grown so confidently aggressive that it all too frequently outruns art, to realise the importance of Pinero's achievement. For example, in The Second Mrs Tanqueray,⁵ our appreciation of the effort to close the gap between drama and actual existence is hampered by the

1. Saints and Sinners, Act II, Sc.ii.

2. op.cit., Act IV, Sc.ii.

3. Mrs. Henry Wood, East Lynne, 1861. This novel suffered several melodramatic adaptations.

4. H.A. Jones, 'Religion and the Stage', appendix to Saints and Sinners, 1891, p.119.

5. A.W. Pinero, The Second Mrs Tanqueray, 1894, Act. IV.

stiff settings of an outdated society, the rather stilted dialogue, and the presence of stock characters such as the irritatingly priggish Ellean and Cayley Drummle, the conventional confiding friend. The smooth flow of the objective presentation is frequently broken by epigrammatic exposition of the moral theme, but the projection of this theme into dramatic terms is admirably handled in an arresting plot and a more subtle, though still imperfect, shading of characterisation than Jones had achieved in the rigid character contrast of Saints and Sinners. What greatness is to be found in the play lies in its chief character. In Paula, Finero successfully translates an abstract moral issue in terms of human suffering, and, at the point at which she sees herself as the world will see her

And I shall have no weapon to fight with - not one serviceable little bit of prettiness left in me to defend myself with!¹

his heroine approaches closely to tragic stature, for her awareness is a genuine tragic awareness resulting from the fusion of her character with dramatic event.

Meanwhile a fresh and powerful current was

1. The Second Mrs Tanqueray, Act IV.

beginning to flow into the gathering stream of serious drama. A new force was being brought to bear upon the problem of rehabilitating the English stage - a force essentially destructive. It was George Bernard Shaw who realised that, before one can build, the ground must be cleared, and his approach to seriousness, realism, and clear vision is over the shattered monuments of conventional ideals. His creed is the love of truth and the belief in mental effort and his long life's work was a constant struggle to clear the public mind of romantic, moral, religious and philanthropic cant. His plays form a series of merciless attacks on every aspect of idealistic delusion. Arms and the Man,¹ The Man of Destiny² and O'Flaherty, V.C.³ tear down the false romantic picture of the military hero and the glories of war. Caesar and Cleopatra⁴ ridicules superstitious sentimentalism about the past obscuring human actuality, and Androcles and the Lion⁵ substitutes a deliberately unpalatable exposure

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1. G.B. Shaw, Arms and the Man, 1894.
 2. G.B. Shaw, The Man of Destiny, 1896.
 3. G.B. Shaw, O'Flaherty, V.C., 1915.
 4. G.B. Shaw, Caesar and Cleopatra, 1899.
 5. G.B. Shaw, Androcles and the Lion, 1912.

of human fact for the mawkish emotionalism which gathers about martyrdom. Widowers' Houses¹ and Major Barbara² provide a cutting answer to the querulous philanthropist -

You have made for yourself something that you call a morality or a religion or what not. It doesn't fit the facts. Well, scrap it.³

and The Devil's Disciple⁴ makes a notably bitter attack on a false conception of religion.

Shaw, then, is the great iconoclast, slashing his way through self deception and conventional idealism, and forcing his audience to think again in the hope that they may learn to observe, not what they wish to see, but what is actually there to be seen. His contribution to the battle to reinstate naturalism and realism in the English theatre is satire, that most effective of literary weapons. Jones and Pinero preached to the world, but Shaw laughed at it. His greatness lies in his clarity of vision, and in the seeming amusement with which he digs up the confusion and rubbish in conventional conceptions.

1. G.B. Shaw, Widowers' Houses, 1892.

2. G.B. Shaw, Major Barbara, 1905.

3. Major Barbara, Act III.

4. G.B. Shaw, The Devil's Disciple, 1897.

His wit, his intelligence, and his apparent sense of the humour of the situation appeal irresistibly to the audience even while he is crushing their most cherished beliefs. Shaw's attitude to the promotion of clear and realistic thinking may well be compared with Eliot's approach to the communication of spiritual experience - if the audience gets its "strip tease" it will "swallow"¹ the serious thought.

An accusation frequently brought against Shaw is that his approach to this serious thought is negative and destructive rather than positive and creative. However, on two important occasions his manifesto - always face up to the facts - is openly declared. In Man and Superman,² hell is conceived as the conclave of illusion, earth as the "home of the slaves of reality",³ and the inhabitants of heaven, who have achieved that state of normal vision to which Shaw dedicated his lifelong dramatic effort, are "the masters of reality",⁴ - "and there you

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Five Points on Dramatic Writing', from a letter to Ezra Pound printed in Townsman, July 1938.
 2. G.B. Shaw, Man and Superman, 1903.
 3. op. cit., Act III.
 4. op. cit.

have our difference: to be in hell is to drift: to be in heaven is to steer".¹ So, too, Lilith² looks forward to the time when man shall reject his confusion of deceptive theories and look only on the truth.

To the vortex freed from matter, to the whirlpool in pure intelligence that, when the world began, was a whirlpool in pure force.³

He who questioned ideals has here become the extreme idealist.

A more serious criticism which may be levelled at Shaw is that his work illustrates one of the gravest dangers to which the newly born serious drama was exposed. Preoccupied as he was with the dramatic exemplification of the problems, ideas and misconceptions of his age, he failed to relate these problems and ideas to permanent human truth. His comedy is rendered not in human terms, but in the contrast between conventional obsessions and his own startlingly clear-sighted realism. The moving forces in his plays are ideas embodied in character which has a distinct tendency towards contemporary type. If,

1. op.cit.

2. G.B. Shaw, Back to Methuselah, 1921.

3. op.cit., Pt.V.

for example, we examine the dramatic presentation of his dominant concern with the feminist problem, we find that characters such as Vivie Warren,¹ Anne Whitefield,² Grace Tranfield³ and even Barbara Undershaft⁴ have no depth of existence beyond the immediate context of their social situation. Already they are becoming outdated, and begin to have, in place of a compelling timeless existence, the attraction of family portraits dressed in what was once considered to be the height of fashion. Furthermore, and of more serious consequence, the action of the drama is frequently held up while the playwright brings his ideas into open discussion among his characters. Superfluous intellectual debating of this kind is as fatal to the essential objectivity of the drama as decorative, inorganic poetry. At his best, Shaw carries off protracted argument by the audacity of his opinions and by his sparkling wit. At his worst he meanders into the "dramatized Blue Book"⁵ of which The Apple Cart⁶ is the most monumental example.

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1. G.B. Shaw, Mrs Warren's Profession, 1894.
 2. Man and Superman, 1903.
 3. G.B. Shaw, The Philanderer, 1898.
 4. Major Barbara, 1905.
 5. U.M. Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, 1939, p.6.
 6. G.B. Shaw, The Apple Cart, 1929.

A great individualist, a great humourist, and a great thinker, Shaw will, nevertheless, inevitably suffer in the dramatists' fight against time. He concerned himself too exclusively with immediate circumstance at the expense of permanent values. Once the problem has been solved and the idea rejected, humanity turns elsewhere to seek a more comprehensive record of its being.

Meanwhile, the serious drama was gathering force, passing as it did in the first decade of the twentieth century into the hands of Galsworthy, Barker, Harkin and Houghton, and, long before the closing of Shaw's dramatic career, the mission to re-instate realism, naturalism and seriousness of purpose on the English stage was to be accomplished. The rehabilitation of the English theatre was brought about by a group of dramatists who insistently directed the attention of the public to contemporary problems, injustices and maladjustments, and in the early years of this century the drama was deliberately and strongly impregnated with the social unrest of the time. New ideas were matched in conflict with old conventions, theories of modern living were discussed, and a revaluation of social, moral and ethical standards was demanded. Thus, then, the drama was brought back into contact with actual existence. However, this rehabilitation was subject to serious limitations, the gravest of these being a

tendency to substitute the actual of social circumstance for the real of humanity's truth. When this point is reached we find dramatic art replaced by propoganda.

Among the dramatists of this period, John Galsworthy is undoubtedly at once the most prolific and the greatest. His greatness lies in that he saw not only the social injustice of the contemporary situation, but the possibility of translating this social injustice into terms of human conflict and human suffering, - that is, into terms of genuine drama. That he was keenly concerned with the problems of society as problems to be solved is undeniable, but, unlike a certain group of characters in one of his own plays, he never "lost sight of the individual".¹ Because he viewed the circumstances of his time always in relationship to permanent human emotions, they provide him, not with a theme for dramatised discussion, but with material for genuine tragedy. Galsworthy's conception of tragedy, though more limited in that it is applied to a particular social situation rather than to "the general, measureless process of existence, wherein all activity is included" which "cares nothing, in working itself out, for the needs and desires

1. J. Galsworthy, The Pigeon, 1912, Act II.

of individual existence",¹ is closely akin to that of Thomas Hardy. In Galsworthy's plays tragedy is rendered in terms of humanity - the personal emotion and the individual viewpoint and circumstance - in conflict with the terrible and irresistible force of a completely impersonal social system. Characters are thrown into opposition by circumstance, but both sides, whether they win or lose the external struggle which forms the outer action of the play, are equally implicated in the tragic situation. For Galsworthy is a man, not thumping a tub for a particular section of society, but pitying the suffering and glorying in the unconquerable spirit of a human nature fighting against this circumstance.

For example, the tragic significance of Strife² does not lie in the afflictions of the starving workers, but in the breaking of two fine men, and all for nothing. The moment of tragedy is that in which Roberts and Antony, their respective worlds shattered, stand face to face in respectful silence, and Tench realises - "All this - all this - and - and what for?"³ In The Skin Game,⁴

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1. L. Abercombie, Thomas Hardy. A Critical Study, 1912, p.26.
 2. J. Galsworthy, Strife, 1909.
 3. op.cit., Act.III.
 4. J. Galsworthy, The Skin Game, 1920.

the battle between the landed gentry and the new industrial power is important only in so far as it gives rise to the tragic situation of two men, allied on the fundamental human level of loyalty to their own kin, yet set irrevocably at odds by outward circumstance. The tragedy is in the fact that "we're all humane men",¹ and yet, under pressure of principle and social situation, "who knows where things end when they once begin?".² This reflection might well apply both to The Silver Box³ and to Justice.⁴ In these plays, wrongdoing, pathetic and excusable judged in its particular context, is brought up against the impersonal "justice" of the law which looks only at the deed and not at the motive, and there is set in motion an unexpected and uncontrollable tragedy. Similarly, in The Eldest Son⁵ and Loyalties,⁶ ordinary, decent, humane people become involved, to their own bewilderment, in a tragedy of circumstance. Moreover, the most painful expression of Galsworthy's conception of

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1. Strife, Act III.
 2. J. Galsworthy, The Skin Game, Act III, Sc. ii.
 3. J. Galsworthy, The Silver Box, 1906.
 4. J. Galsworthy, Justice, 1910.
 5. J. Galsworthy, The Eldest Son, 1912.
 6. J. Galsworthy, Loyalties, 1922.

tragedy, is at those moments when impartiality itself is caught unawares by a sudden consciousness of the tragic implication. Such a moment is that when Cokeson cries with a startled misgiving - "Here! Here! What are we doing?"¹

There is nothing abstract in Galsworthy's presentation of the social problem. His plays are fully projected, and impregnated with that particular viewpoint and emotional implication which is the true life of the drama. He substantiates his view of life with a self-commenting, objective presentation, thus achieving that "precise statement of life which is at the same time a point of view, a world; a world which the author's mind has subjected to a process of simplification."² Every element of form images the dramatist's tragic conception, played out as it is in terms of spontaneously developed character speaking in impassioned personal utterance. It is perhaps worth noting in this connection the particular skill with which the writer uses setting for dramatic effect. The single example of The Silver Box will serve to illustrate this; besides the obvious contrast of the Barthwicks' with

1. Justice, Act I.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', Dial, November, 1920, p.446.

the Jones' living room, there is a more subtle implication in the fact that Mrs Jones carries home a parcel wrapped in The Times¹ - probably the very copy which separated the Barthwicks at breakfast. Thus, then, the ultimate form of the drama completely replaces and embodies the underlying concept.

Galsworthy's contribution to the newly born serious drama is of great significance. Of the group of dramatists working towards the rehabilitation of the English drama at this time, Galsworthy approaches most nearly to the imaginative integrity of Ibsen. His indignant awareness of social injustice is translated directly into terms of character and action, and is important only in so far as it throws light on the essential humanity, suffering and dignity of man. In the plays of this dramatist we are aware less of a contemporary evil than of ourselves as human beings allied in the very fact of existence. Galsworthy, like Ibsen, demands not so much a change of outward circumstance as a change of heart, and his drama is directed not at our reason and our social theory, but at the deeper springs of our being. Here, an external fact has been assimilated into the dramatic revelation of an inner truth.

1. The Silver Box, Act II, Sc.i.

Closely associated with the name of Galsworthy is that of Harley Granville-Barker. Granville-Barker is an uncertain writer, constantly experimenting with technique, so that it is difficult either to characterise him as a dramatist or precisely to estimate the nature and value of his contribution to the new movement. The thought underlying his plays obviously links him with the drama of Ibsen and that derived from and akin to it. We have here the familiar questioning of moral and social conventions, the problem of woman's place in society, the demand for a revaluation of living, for new ideas and standards which must meet the requirements of a "new century".¹ However, the intellectual intensity of Granville-Barker's concern with these problems subjects his plays to immediate and serious criticism, for the action and characterisation of his drama is frequently made to carry too great a weight of epigrammatic commentary. For instance, the characters in Waste² are idiosyncratically aware of the moral implication of their situation, and one wearies of their eternal analysis of their own lives in relationship to contemporary theories of religion,

1. H. Granville-Barker, The Marrying of Ann Leete, 1899, Act IV.

2. H. Granville-Barker, Waste, 1906-7.

politics, education, and every aspect of social living. The firm dramatic outline of Trebell's tragedy is recurrently blurred by intellectual discussion of countless principles. The Voysey Inheritance¹ is more successful. The ethical principles under examination are more skilfully fused with a gripping dramatic event, and the issue of Edward's development from a conventional moral righteousness based only upon principle to a moral strength and humanity springing from the nexus of his character with the plot, is less frequently side-tracked than was the potentially strong tragic situation of Waste. The Madras House² primarily provides a delightful museum of character study, but one again feels the now familiar questioning of contemporary values and ways of life is the underlying restriction of the play. The clash between the views of Constantine and Huxstable sets in motion that serious thought which strives towards the ultimate goal, a culture that "must spring in good time from the happiness of a whole people".³

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1. H. Granville-Barker, The Voysey Inheritance, 1903-5.
 2. H. Granville-Barker, The Madras House, 1910.
 3. op.cit., Act IV.

From the point of view of this study, The Marrying of Ann Leete is of particular significance. This play provides a striking illustration of the possibility of developing prose drama into a force akin to the emotional power of poetry. Here Granville-Barker is approaching, from the opposite direction, the muted poetry which Eliot is later to seek through the modification of verse itself. The dialogue of this play is charged with an innate, unspoken poetry, achieved through a flat, intensified utterance, imaging the eddies of a deeper thought and feeling, and yet retaining the illusion of everyday speech. Such is Carnaby's description of his wife - "She was not beautiful ... then she died."¹ Realistic detail is here sharpened into symbolism, and the curt phrases which provide the characters with utterance suggest the emotional depths of a poetry which never openly breaks the realistic surface

George: Morning! These candles still smell.

Sarah: How lively one feels and isn't.

Carnaby: The flowers are opening.

Ann: (In a whisper) Couldn't we go in?

Sarah: Never run away.

1. The Marrying of Ann Leete, Act III.

Ann: Everything looks so odd.

Sarah: What's o'clock ... my lord?

Lord John: Half after four.

Ann: (To Sarah) my eyes are not behind.

George: What ghosts we seem!

Sarah: What has ~~made~~ us spend such a night?¹

A new strength is entering the realistic prose drama: a strength dangerous to a poetic drama which must now satisfy the demand for naturalism established by the prose play.

The plays of St. John Hankin are very much a product of the prevailing thought behind the English drama during the early years of this century, but it is doubtful that they made any significant modification in the development of the new dramatic growth. However, they do reveal many of the pitfalls into which serious drama was all too liable to fall. Hankin, like Shaw, is a destructive force. Like Shaw, he engages himself in attack on the conventional ideals and short sighted ethical standards of his day. At the same time he attempts, in some measure, to express his views on these ideals and standards in terms of human relationship and emotional experience - a

1. op.cit., Act I.

process of the imagination which underlies Galsworthy's tragedy. But Hankin has neither the apparent unconcern of Shaw's wit nor Galsworthy's keen sense of tragic implication and human significance. The result is that his work is compounded of a relentless cynicism streaked with unexpected veins of sentimentality.

By introducing into each play a touchstone of true values, Hankin employs a device familiar in the work of Ibsen. However, the setting and dialogue of his drama, with the exception of The Last of the De Mullins,¹ suggests a comedy of middle class manners, and the snattering of this convention with sudden outbursts of bitterness and sentiment is as disastrous as was the attempt to mingle pure wit and genuine emotion in the later stages of the Restoration Comedy. The dramatist's imaginative conception is capable of neither great comedy nor true tragedy. The humour of an essentially comic situation in The Two Mr. Wetherbys² and The Return of the Prodigal³ is embarrassed by the sentimental implication

1. St. John Hankin, The Last of the De Mullins, 1907.

2. St. John Hankin, The Two Mr. Wetherbys, 1902.

3. St. John Hankin, The Return of the Prodigal, 1904.

of an underlying depth of feeling ostentatiously covered over by a self-conscious cynicism. The plot of The Cassilis Engagement¹ might well have resulted ultimately in high comedy or great tragedy. In actual fact the comedy is marred by an attempt to relate an extremely witty surface to underlying emotions, the presentation of which smacks of cheap sentiment. Mrs Cassilis's handling of the situation has some brilliantly amusing results, but we are slightly nauseated by the dramatist's reference of the comic development to a conventionally conceived and fulsomely presented emotion

Mrs Cassilis: (defiantly) I would. Ah, Margaret, you've no children. (Her voice quivering and her eyes shining with intensity of emotion). You don't know how it feels to see your son wrecking his life and not be able to prevent it.²

The tragic potentiality of the circumstance is faintly indicated by Mrs Borridge's pathetic disappointment - "I did so want 'er to be respectable. I 'aven't always been respectable myself, and I know the value of it,"³ in the same way in which the tragic possibilities of the

1. St. John Hankin, The Cassilis Engagement, 1905.

2. op.cit., Act.II.

3. op.cit., Act III.

revelation in The Charity that Began at Home¹ ultimately resolve themselves in terms of a tearful pathos, and the curtain comes down on De Mullin in a welter of sentiment and a maudlin exaggeration of the joys of motherhood. It is this sentiment accompanied by his paradoxical cynicism, which causes Hankin to fall badly between two dramatic conceptions of life, and to mingle indiscriminantly two incompatible dramatic moods. One suspects his integrity with justification; in the development of the serious drama his work is symptomatic rather than a significant organic growth.

Hankin, however, is soon to be outdone. With the work of a group of writers connected with Miss Horniman's Repertory Theatre in Manchester,² and known generally as the "Manchester School", realistic drama moves towards a bolder and starker naturalism. It moves out of the socially conscious environment of middle class homes down to the cottages of Lancashire and the slum back streets of provincial towns. It moves into the kitchen of 137, Burnley Road Hindle, and here we encounter a heroine of different extraction from the

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1. St. John Hankin, The Charity that Began at Home, 1905.
 2. The Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, where Miss Horniman's repertory company put on about 100 new plays between 1907 and 1921.

newly educated, self-conscious middle class feminist. The independence of Fanny Hawthorn, who will "earn enough brass to keep me going" as long "as there's weaving sheds in Lancashire"¹ springs not from position or education, but from inherent self respect and sound common sense. Like Maggie Hobson,² she proves herself equal and superior to her mate, not with the aid of theory and argument, but with the natural force of her personality. The strength of these women is not endowed by the propagandist enthusiasm of their creators, it is the spontaneous self reliance of a hard working people, for "It's a poor sort of woman who'll stay lazy when she sees her best chance slipping from her."³ This is realistic drama rooted not in contemporary theory, but in contemporary life. In Hindle Wakes and Hobson's Choice, and in The Dear Departed,⁴ The Price of Coal⁵ and Lonesome Like,⁶ Houghton and

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1. S. Houghton, Hindle Wakes, 1912, Act III.
 2. H. Brighouse, Hobson's Choice, 1916.
 3. Hobson's Choice, Act I.
 4. S. Houghton, The Dear Departed, 1910 (produced at the Gaiety, Nov. 1908).
 5. H. Brighouse, The Price of Coal, 1911.
 6. H. Brighouse, Lonesome Like, 1914.

Brighouse are seeking, not so much to illustrate a problem, as to present a people. The manner of this presentation is a fully developed, unselfconscious realism. The settings reproduce the familiar surroundings of a working class daily life; language, no longer based on the affectations of social intercourse, is stripped of epigrammatic suavity, and moves in the rhythms of everyday speech. The naturalistic drama is grown to maturity and confidence, finding itself capable of dealing with the grimmest and most sordid actuality. It enters the dingy house of the Cleggs,¹ where one strong minded woman fights the bitterly realistic struggle to defend her children against a despicably weak husband and his maunderingly sentimental mother. It moves into the shabby, depressing rooms in Acacia Avenue,² where humanity, stunted for so long by the monotony of a daily round which it fears to relinquish, stirs feebly in a momentary attempt to get out to the light of a new and free life. Unflinchingly it portrays the harsh realism

1. St. John Ervine, Jane Clegg, 1913.

2. E. Baker, Chains, 1911.

of life in the provincial north - and it is a far cry from the hot-house naturalism of Caste to the granite honesty of Rutherford and Son.¹ "Life's work, keeping your head up and your heels down. Sleep, and begetting children, rearing them up to work when you've gone, that's life."²

Thus the battle for the rehabilitation of the English stage had been won, but it was to prove, in the years following, something of a Pyrrhic victory. Ibsen had employed realistic detail in the manner of the poet, creating a symbolic structure which exactly imaged his conception. His realism was a poetic realism - that is to say he substantiated his dramatic concept with an illusion of reality. The English drama derived from Ibsen had missed the poetry in his work, and the prose ~~form~~ which they established in the theatre became, in the hands of lesser dramatists, more of a danger than an asset to the imaginative integrity of both playwrights and audience. At the end of the first World War the genuine pioneering impulse behind the serious prose play had withered. Prose drama was fast becoming mere

1. Githa Sowerby, Rutherford and Son, 1912.

2. op.cit.

depiction, inflated with a deceptive implication of greater values, which was in fact mere sentimentality. This emotional prostitution had been anticipated by Maugham, who like Bennett, was engaged chiefly in concocting those charming souffles of wit which were later to become characteristic of Coward and Novello. Meanwhile Barrie had meandered on his whimsical way - charming, fantastic, sentimental and maddening - delighting his audience, but marring everything he touched with that irritating coyness which all too frequently became entirely nauseating.

By the twenties a sizeable host of craftsmen was gathering to provide material for the modern popular repertory company. Sherriff¹ and Monkhouse² were exploiting the cheap emotionalism engendered by war, and Ronald Mackenzie was congratulating himself on the realisation that "this man Beethoven, got nearer to reality - the very stuff of the universe - than any man before or since."³ The theatre began to be flooded by an endless stream of plays - through Dane, McEvoy, Van Druten, Levy,

1. R.C. Sherriff, Journey's End, 1929.

2. A. Monkhouse, The Conquering Hero, 1923.

3. R. Mackenzie, Musical Chairs, 1931, Act I.

Shairp, Sutro, Dodie Smith to Emlyn Williams and Terence Rattigan - frequently exhibiting a brilliant sense of the theatrically effective, but varnished over with the tawdry gloss of popular sentiment and superficial philosophy. During the last three decades of this century the realistic play has been content to substitute mere imitation¹ for Ibsen's illusion of reality. Photographic naturalism, through a countless number of trivial and sentimental comedies and pseudo tragedies set between an alarm clock and a gas cooker, has catered avidly for popular emotionalism. The prose dramatist, incited by box office returns, captures his audience with theatrical situation, and embroiders this situation with philosophic platitudes which give an illusion of depths he has not the capacity to sound.

Thus, then, the prose play, having missed the poetry at its source, was soon to build on the sands of mere entertainment and superficial sentiment. Meantime, however, a new current had entered the stream of English drama. It was left to the Irish Dramatic Movement to bring back into the English theatre the poetry which had been overlooked in Ibsen. While his English contemporaries,

1. Not used here in the Aristotlean sense.

preoccupied with 'problems' which were to him synonymous with the "whirling circumference"¹ of life, were developing a consciously naturalistic technique, W.B. Yeats was attempting to lead his age back to a greater reality, the reality of spiritual experience, for "we, who are believers, cannot see reality anywhere but in the soul itself."² The social drama concerned itself with topical questions and ideas, with the "continual, restless mimicries of the surface of life";³ by reproducing the outward appearance of daily speech and action, it was in fact engaged in presenting the deceptive reality of the actual, in the "substitution of apparent for real truth".⁴ The Irish Dramatic Movement, under the conscious pioneering leadership of Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory dedicated itself to the communication of poetic truth, those permanent, ever recurrent features of our state of being which form the underlying reality of human existence. It sought to replace the superficial movement of prose realism by an image of spiritual motion - "the nobler movements that the heart sees, the rhythmical

1. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, 1923, p.98.

2. op.cit., p.124.

3. op.cit., p.49.

4. op.cit., p.156.

movements that seem to flow up into the imagination from some deeper life than that of the individual soul."¹

Furthermore, and of great significance, the Irish gave rebirth to the overt utterance of high poetry in the English speaking drama. For Yeats "without fine words there is no literature".² Yet life furnishes the material for art, and its inspiration is a vision of some portion of life, and thus Yeats the dramatist was faced with the barren resources of contemporary social intercourse. He overcame this problem by turning to a living language vibrant with innate poetry, to the "English idiom of the Irish-thinking people of the west".³ Here, to the hand of art, was a living poetry, a current language on which "abundant, resonant, beautiful, laughing, living speech"⁴ could be built.

Yeats was dominantly concerned with mystical experience, but his belief in the theatre as the vehicle for poetry led to his attempt to express his vision in dramatic terms. A popular criticism of Yeats is that he

1. op.cit., p.48.

2. op.cit., p.174.

3. op.cit., p.29.

4. W.B.Yeats, 'Preface to the First Edition of The Well of the Saints', 1905, The Cutting of an Agate, 1919, p.115.

is so essentially a lyric poet that he inevitably fails as a dramatist. This is a superficial reproach. It must be remembered that, what Yeats is tracing is not the progress of outer action, but the development of spiritual experience, and, when evaluating his work, we must take care to differentiate between the truly dramatic and the purely theatrical. Genuine dramatic poetry traces the eddies of deeper thought and motion, and the "chief business"¹ of poetic drama is the communication of spiritual experience fused with a sufficiently convincing illusion of outward appearance demanded by the audience "for preserving the necessary credibility".² Our difficulty lies in the fact that, for us, outward appearance is synonymous with ordinary, everyday happening in a prosaic contemporary world. What we have to remember is that Yeats was assuming the living imagination of a people for whom the ancient legends of Ireland - "those old stories of the folk which were made by men who believed so much in the soul, and so little in anything else, that they were never entirely certain that the earth was solid

1. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.258.

2. op.cit., p.260.

under the foot-sole"¹ - were interwoven with the substance of actual existence. An interpretation of the world of the Sidhe is as easily acceptable to the people of Ireland as is the story of Beckett's martyrdom to the contemporary Englishman.

We cannot justly accuse Yeats of dividing up lyric poetry between a varying number of characters, and attaching it loosely to an inorganic plot. If we take, for example, The King's Threshold,² we find that the dominant theme of the struggle between spiritual reality and the corrupting confines of the actual is substantiated by every aspect of the ultimate form of the drama. It is imaged not only in Seanchan's affirmation of the poetic faith, but also in the plot which involves a poet's martyrdom, and in the contrast of characters tracing contrasting conceptions of a true standard of values. The imagery of the play is impregnated with personal viewpoint and personal passion, from the living colloquial poetry of the cripple's "until he be as rotten

1. Plays and Controversies, p.123.

2. W.B. Yeats, The King's Threshold, 1904, COLLECTED PLAYS, 1952

as an old mushroom",¹ through the oratorical dignity of the King's utterance and the rough spice of the soldier's "snuff it, old hedgehog, and unroll yourself",² to the impassioned cry of the poetic soul at the limits of its human confine.

The scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame,
God's laughter at the shattering of the world.³

Here Yeats substantiates his own belief in the absolute value of art in convincing dramatic terms.

However, Yeats is not completely successful as a dramatist in that he does not always relate his vision of spiritual reality to permanent human truth. In The Unicorn from the Stars⁴ and The Hour-Glass⁵ he attempts to communicate the supreme mystical comprehension that the ultimate realisation of the spirit can only be fulfilled by a complete annihilation of the outer self, of the "twittering world"⁶ of external motion, for "where

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

4. W.B. Yeats, The Unicorn from the Stars, 1908, COLLECTED PLAYS.

5. W.B. Yeats, The Hour-Glass, 1914, op.cit.

6. T.S.Eliot, Four Quartets, 1944, 'Burnt Norton.'

there is nothing - there is God!"¹ -

We perish into God and sink away
Into reality - the rest's a dream.²

This sublime awareness is neither evolved from dramatic event nor resolved in terms of the drama. Its origin is not in human, but in supernatural experience, and its resolution is in death. As in The Family Reunion,³ the impassioned spirituality of these plays outruns dramatic event, and the result is that their finest poetry is not genuinely dramatic. Accompanied as it is by remote settings and a language which has its roots in the living imagination of a people unspoilt by the banalities of contemporary society, the visionary quality with which Yeats's characters are endowed does not jarr so violently with its context as does the introduction of prophetic insight into the Monchensey's drawing room.⁴ However, with the writing of the Plays for Dancers,⁵

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1. The Unicorn from the Stars, Act III
 2. The Hour Glass.
 3. T.S.Eliot, The Family Reunion, 1939.
 4. The Family Reunion.
 5. W.B.Yeats, 'Plays for Dancers'. (At the Hawk's Well, 1917, The Only Jealously of Emer, 1919, The Dreaming of the Bones, 1919, Calvary, 1920, The Cat and the Moon, 1926.) Collected Plays, 1952.

the proposition of the mystical experience is obviously no longer made up in human terms. The poet's vision of humanity has been refined and concentrated to a remote, ritualistic symbol imaging the working of the spirit plainly confronted. In the end Yeats turned from the theatre as it is generally known, seeking to communicate pure spirituality in his own "unpopular theatre",¹ "the ancient theatre that can be made by unrolling a carpet or marking out a place with a stick, or setting a screen against the wall."²

The importance of Yeats in the development of British drama in this century can scarcely be over-estimated. Yeats brought back into the theatre spiritual reality and poetic truth, a true standard of values to challenge all that was artificial and superficial on the stage. Furthermore, he taught the drama to express itself once more in living poetry, not only through his own work in the theatre, but through his fostering of the genius which was to surpass him in the plays of John Millington Synge. It was Yeats who advised Synge to go to the remote

1. Plays and Controversies, p.212.

2. Note on the First Performance of At The Hawk's Well, Plays and Controversies, p.416.

islands of the west, ^{and} ~~where~~, through a crack in the floor of a Wicklow cottage,¹ he was to assimilate the natural poetry expressive of the living imagination of the folk.

Synge is the great poet dramatist of the movement. His conception of the nature of the drama challenges the aims of the contemporary prose play with the integrity of the pure artist concerned only with the life of the imagination. For Synge the drama is made serious, "not by the degree in which it is taken up with problems that are serious in themselves", but by its content of fundamental, unchanging reality and imaginative truth, "by the degree in which it gives the nourishment, not very easy to define, on which our imaginations live".² The drama embodies the initial dramatic vision, and "like the symphony , does not teach or prove anything,³ but rather performs the supreme function of art by recreating in the minds of its audience that imaginative experience which was its inspiration.

1. J.M. Synge, Preface to The Playboy of the Western World, 1907; COLLECTED PLAYS, 1952.
2. J.M. Synge, Preface to The Tinker's Wedding, 1907, op.cit.
3. op.cit.

The ultimate form of Synge's plays clearly acknowledges that initial imaginative intensification which Abercrombie termed "conceptual poetry".¹ Every element of form is "in the scale"² of this "conceptual poetry", and all are mutually creative towards the final objective presentation which forms the complete image of the initial concept. Synge thinks spontaneously in terms of human action and of poetry, and each is inextricably bound to the other in the living texture of his imaginative thought. This creative process is, however, true of all great poetic drama, and we must look more closely at the genesis of Synge's art if we are to comprehend that essentially unique quality which renders his plays almost inimitable. Synge's work is the result of a rare combination - the power of the dramatist with that of the nature mystic,-and the fulfilment of his genius depended upon circumstances equally rare. It depended upon the existence of a people so intimate with the forces of nature that the imagination of the artist could, without straining credibility, intensify the fact of this intimacy to a vision of underlying reality at the point

1. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.256.

2. op.cit.

out of time where man and nature merge in spiritual truth. Synge found such a people in the Aran Islands. He found a living poetry, not only in the language of this folk, but in their very state of being. Removed as they were from contaminating influences of an artificial civilisation, the "primary impulses of being" were "infinitely more evident" in their speech and action" than in the speech and action of actuality's affairs".¹ By reason of nature they already "were poetry"² to the hand of a great visionary dramatist, and the fusion of art with such life inevitably resulted in a unique perfection.

Nature is the very stuff of the dramatic life of these plays. It enters into the action of the drama,³ provides their setting, and consistently impregnates the imagery of characters' utterance. Art's "simplification and exaggeration"⁴ of character innately intimate with the primary forces of existence results in that visionary presentation of humanity as an organic part of the life of nature which is the distinctive feature of Synge's drama.

1. op.cit., p.254.

2. op.cit.

3. Notably in Riders to the Sea, 1904, in which the sea itself is the chief protagonist.

4. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.254.

Synge works completely by direct presentation, and yet over his characters and setting is cast "the light that never was, on land or sea"¹ a light in which the fundamental reality of human and natural existence is at once revealed.

The greatness of Synge lies in his superb fusion of living and imaginative poetry. Synge gave back to the drama a poetry based on the rhythms and images of a contemporary speech. The English poets of the nineteenth century had employed an utterance already hardened into a written symbol. Synge moulded his language from a warm and vibrant speech "where everything is old and alive and nothing common or threadbare."² This language is based on the cadences and imagery of a people naturally poetic. It is the voice of this people which protests "I wouldn't lay my hand on him for the Lough Nahangan and it filled with gold",³ or threatens to "have the divil making garters of your limbs tonight".⁴ Art may rise naturally to the intensified "and I crying

1. W. Wordsworth, Elegiac Stanzas, 1805.

2. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.30.

3. J.M. Synge, The Shadow of the Glen, 1903.

4. J.M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World, Act II.

for a love will be the like of a star shining on a little harbour by the sea"¹ when its roots are so firmly entwined in life itself.

However, the work of Synge inevitably forms a cul-de-sac in the British drama's way through the wood. As Eliot points out, "the language of Synge is not available except for plays set among the same people"² Synge magnificently fulfilled the ideals of the Irish Dramatic Movement, but his was an artistic triumph not to be repeated. An attempt to repeat perfection is necessarily mere imitation. Nevertheless, though he did not establish a dramatic form capable of further modification he gave the drama an impetus towards imaginative integrity the value of which can scarcely be overestimated. It is to Yeats and Synge that the English drama is indebted for the revival of its poetry and its imagination, for the re-awakening of a faith in the dramatic expression of a reality deeper than the surface level of prose realism and photographic naturalism. These early writers of the Irish Dramatic Movement contributed to the drama something of greater significance than mere technique, - they

1. J.M. Synge, Deirdre of the Sorrows, 1909, Act III.

2. T.S. Eliot, Selected Prose, p.74.

revitalised the belief in living poetry in the theatre.

Even while the work of the original leaders of the movement was at its height, a new facet of the Irish genius had begun to reveal itself. Yeats, reviewing the situation in 1919, acknowledged the change which had come about since the early years, and wrote of the latest dramatists "they have been excellent just in so far as they have become all eye and ear, their minds not smoking lamps, as at times they would have wished, but clear mirrors".¹ "The making^{articulate} of all the dumb classes, each with its own knowledge of the world, its own dignity" was still in progress, but "all objective, with the objectivity of the office and the workshop, of the newspaper and the street, of mechanism and of politics".² Colum³ had concerned himself with the problems raised by the encroachment of modern civilisation on the peasant way of life, while Robinson and Murray, in The Chancy Name⁴ and Birthright⁵ had directly presented "a stern record of hard

1. W.B. Yeats, 'A People's Theatre', The Irish Statesman, 1919, republished Plays and Controversies, pp.199-218.

2. op.cit.

3. F.Colum, The Land, 1905.

4. L.Robinson, The Chancy Name, 1908.

5. T.C.Murray, Birthright, 1910.

fact and hard character".¹ A new objectivity and naturalism had found its place in the Irish drama, and the way was prepared for the "making articulate" of yet another "dumb class" in the early O'Casey's² realistic presentation of life in the Irish slums. Yet, as Yeats pointed out, the originators of The Irish Dramatic movement did not "set out to create this sort of theatre",³ and it is not to "this sort of theatre" that the poetically starved English drama turned for sustenance.

In England the poet dramatists of the nineteenth century had failed to establish a living poetic drama in the theatre⁴ and the turn of the century found poetry moribund on the English stage. With a superb disregard for the demands of contemporary living seeking expression through a new form of art, Stephen Phillips was exploiting the commercial possibilities of the pseudo Elizabethan play. While the prose drama around him struggled forward Phillips looked steadily and complacently backward over

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1. U.M. Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, 1939, p.192.
 2. Sean O'Casey, The Shadow of a Gunman, 1923; Juno and the Paycock, 1924.
 3. Plays and Controversies, p.206.
 4. See supra, pp 2-3.

three hundred years. Phillips combines a strong sense of the theatrically effective with an undoubted lyrical gift, and his method is to devise a compelling emotional situation and to decorate it lavishly with all the externals of poetry. The relationship between emotional situation and character, and between these and heightened language is not the organic relationship of genuine drama. Theatrical climaxes and the use of high sounding imagery outruns the thinly imagined characters, with the result that Phillips is most successful in scenes where characters dramatise themselves in pathetic lyricism¹ or what comes perilously near to melodramatic ranting -

Agrippina: A thousand loves and lusts have left no line
 Tremendous fortunes have not touched my hair
 Murder hath left my cheek as the cheek of
 the babe.²

This self-awareness is essentially theatrical, and not the spontaneous growth indicative of genuine drama. Phillips does not relate his big emotional effects to an underlying human truth; his imagery does not trace an inevitable spiritual development - it is arbitrary and bombastic. However, it is not difficult to see why Phillips was so

1. See particularly **S.** Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, 1899.

2. **S.** Phillips, Nero, 1902, Act II.

commercially successful. He flattered his audience with a classical theme while catering prodigally for their delight in spectacle, theatrical attitudes, star performances, romance, melodrama and sentiment. He creates an impression of tremendous passion and significance, and his plays, though cheaply motivated, are skilfully constructed. As theatre they are excellent; as drama, merely adequate.

In the early years of this century Binyon and Sturge Moore are to be found among those carrying a feeble torch for Phillips. Attila¹ is executed in a pretentious blank verse entirely dislocated from life and from truth, flat character completely lacking in the imaginative dimensions of true poetic concept. There is much high sounding imagery -

But now we must make platters of our shields,
And see our royal eagle witched and tamed,
A strutting pigeon in a castle-court
That coasts about the housetops and alights
To preen and coo.²

but it is wooden and artificially exalted, not charged with the swift current of genuine dramatic emotion. The ending of the play is a pathetically weak echo of

1. L. Binyon, Attila, 1907.

2. Attila, Act I.

Antony and Cleopatra.¹

The pillar of the world is broken down
And yet heaven has not fallen!²

The dramatic development of the play has not generated this climax; we cannot accept the exaltation, and we are unmoved or irritated by its expression in arbitrarily heightened language.

Sturge Moore does little more than overload an indifferent narrative play with poetry of no very high quality. He makes no attempt to bring his themes forward and fuse them with contemporary thought into a living imaginative concept, as Eliot was later to do in Murder in the Cathedral.³ Like Johnson, we weary of a new tale of Aphrodite against Artemis,⁴ especially when this tale moves feebly with the shadow of a localised emotion of no universal intensity. Verse rhythms and imagery are completely divorced from life -

1. *ct.* "The crown o' th' earth doth melt. - My lord!
my lord! -
O, wither'd is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fall'n."

2. Attila, Act IV.

3. T.S.Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral, 1935.

4. T. Sturge Moore, Aphrodite against Artemis, 1901.

Her hatred, darkening ever more, hath flowe~~ed~~^{ed},
 Like the great Nile who sometimes brings thick mud
 Into the palaces of Egypt's kings.¹

and image nothing which we recognise as a living reality. With Moore's work modern poetic drama certainly does not advance, and often makes every attempt to retreat.

Thomas Hardy's The Dynasts² is a work infinitely greater in stature than these competent exploitations of an outworn tradition. Of epic proportion and unstageable in its entirety, The Dynasts is something of a tour de force, and as such, it is inevitably set apart from the main stream of dramatic development. However, if the theatre is the ultimate test of drama, yet one cannot disregard Abercrombie's salient question, "why should the great formal advantages of dramatic shape be confined to plays capable of being staged?"³ The "dramatic shape" of The Dynasts is the intense imaginative unity imposed by its conceptual poetry, - "it is in the thing as a whole that its poetry consists".⁴ This conceptual poetry

1. T. Sturge Moore, Marianne, 1911, Act IV.

2. T. Hardy, The Dynasts, 1903-8.

3. L. Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy. A Critical Study, 1912, p.194.

4. Op.cit., p.196.

finds direct expression in the supernatural utterance which crystallises the significance of the vast unfolding human action. Human character and event is referred back to the controlling imaginative theme embodied in the Chorus of Spirits, "the commenting group of spirits has done something remarkable for the drama, it has realised that large imaginative unity which the mere logic of events can only suggest, what was simply war, becomes drama."¹

An obvious comparison may be drawn between Hardy's epic drama and The Rock.² Abercrombie might equally well have written of Eliot's Chorus that they "stand up on the human action like a group of statues on a figured pedestal - a summation in immortals of the multitudinous mortal welter beneath".³ The shape of the two dramatic works is almost identical. In both, the essence of the drama is condensed in the choral interpretation of the external action. The utterance of the Chorus is genuine dramatic poetry - that is to say it is poetry which dramatises the human situation

1. op.cit., pp.185-6.

2. T.S. Eliot, The Rock, 1934. See Chap.III, p.173 ff.

3. L. Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy. A Critical Study, 1912, p.185.

by tracing its spiritual significance in an imagery of words. However, both Hardy and Eliot, by communicating this spiritual significance in the form of choral interludes, expose their work to the danger of a divorce between the surface level of the drama and a cosmic interpretation which is parallel to rather than interwoven with it. As Abercrombie points out, "the easiest way to read The Dynasts is to skip everything printed in italics",¹ and yet it is in the surrounding supernatural drama that the imaginative concept of the poetic drama is embodied. The great panoramic presentation of external event is imaginatively unified by its relationship to the underlying idea - openly revealed by the chorus of spirits - of the inexorable fatality of existence.

The greatness of this dramatic experiment lies in Hardy's realisation of the need for a drama in close touch with life itself. In The Dynasts, experience within the living memory of Hardy's own day is related to permanent features in man's consciousness, for "the phantoms themselves are but abstractions of the human mind shaped in art".² The Dynasts is not a

1. op.cit., p.190.

2. op.cit., p.217.

dramatised historical narrative, but a living reality finding its complement in the living imagination of the reader. Historical fact has been transmuted by the artist into "a characteristic spectacle of worldly event"¹ from which is elicited enduring human truth.

The work of Hardy was not, however, sufficient in itself to give English drama the imaginative impetus which it so desperately needed, and it was, as we have intimated,² from Ireland that this revitalising power came.⁴ The first two decades of the twentieth century saw the birth of the English Poetic Movement, chiefly associated with the names of Masefield, Abercrombie, and Drinkwater. The influence of the Irish dramatists on these English writers was direct and personal. Masefield actually met Drinkwater in 1910 at one of Yeats' literary evenings in Woburn Buildings.³ On a similar occasion, seven years earlier, he had been introduced to Synge, of whose plays he wrote - "they came out of life, and this could not be said of the plays then most in demand".⁴ It was these Irish plays

1. op.cit., p.214.

2. See supra, p. 32 *ffl.*

3. J. Drinkwater, Discovery, pp.176-8.

4. J. Masefield, So Long to Learn, pp.154-5.

which inspired Masfield, born in Gloucestershire, to seek living imaginative material in the life and fable of the English countryside, for, in short, as he said, "someone ought to do something here".¹ Abercrombie and Drinkwater joined him in his task. Gloucestershire provides the setting and background for The Tragedy of Nan,² The Campden Wonder,³ and Mrs. Harrison,⁴ and the later A Play of Saint George⁵ is strongly impregnated with Gloucestershire tradition. Much of Drinkwater's work, including The Storm,⁶ was written at Oakridge. The Gloucestershire countryside is again the scene for Abercrombie's The End of the World,⁷ The Deserter,⁸ and The Staircase.⁹ These English dramatists were attempting to do for England what Synge, Yeats and Lady Gregory had done for Ireland.

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1. op.cit.
 2. J. Masfield, The Tragedy of Nan, 1908.
 3. J. Masfield, The Campden Wonder, 1907.
 4. J. Masfield, Mrs. Harrison, see The Tragedy of Nan and Other Plays, 1909.
 5. J. Masfield, A Play of St. George, 1948.
 6. J. Drinkwater, The Storm, 1915, Pawns, 1917.
 7. L. Abercrombie, The End of the World, 1914. Four Short Plays, 1922.
 8. L. Abercrombie, 'The Deserter', 1922, Four Short Plays, 1922.
 9. L. Abercrombie, The Staircase, 1914, Four Short Plays, 1922.

Masefield's early Gloucestershire plays are discernibly under the influence of Synge. Here there is an obvious attempt to evolve a living poetry from dialectal speech, and to build into the drama that primitive spiritual insight of a people closely related to the primary forces of nature. In The Campden Wonder and Mrs Harrison the attempt is not successful. Masefield is preoccupied with a mood of the spirit at the expense of the drama from which this mood should be spontaneously elicited. He forces the exultation of Mrs Perry's spiritual resignation from a train of event and suffering by which we are not wholly convinced. John Perry's villainy is not fully motivated in character or in situation (the monotonous emphasis on Dick's "twelve shillin' a week"¹ is faintly ludicrous in face of the consequences), and the plot is scarcely credible - indeed it might have done better as a comedy after the style of Lady Gregory's Spreading the News.² Maurya's tragic exultation at the close of Riders to the Sea³ is the climax of a natural spiritual development

1. The Campden Wonder, 1907.

2. Augusta, Lady Gregory, Spreading the News, 1904.

3. J.M. Synge, Riders to the Sea, 1904.

completely motivated by the interaction between character and dramatic event. Her - "no man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied"¹ is the utterance of a spiritual awareness synonymous with the raising of humanity, through suffering, to an understanding beyond the limits of its natural confines. Mrs Perry's "I be an old woman. I ain't got no man, I ain't. Book says us must be patient"² is idiosyncratic and embarrassing. Here, as in the lyrical death of Mrs Harrison,³ Masefield has strained from his drama a significance which it is not able to bear.

These early attempts clearly point the way to the writing of The Tragedy of Nan. In Nan Masefield's efforts to fuse realism and poetic vision are more successful. In the first place he succeeds in evolving heightened language naturally by building the suggestion of living poetry into the less intense dialectal texture of the whole drama. Poetry is interwoven into the relaxed dialogue. Nan, speaking of her love feels "like

1. op.cit.

2. The Campden Wonder, Sc.11.

3. Mrs Harrison, see The Tragedy of Nan, and other plays, 1909.

my 'eart was in flower";¹ Dick describes spice-cake "Like kissing a zweet'eart at 'arvest time. When the girt moon be shining",² and "the little boys zwimming in the river. They be so white and swift, washing themselves. And the splashin' do shine zo. Diamonds."³ Thus the poetic world of the play is gradually created, and, attuned to the ideas and idiom of this world, we can accept the intensified language of the love scene between Nan and Dick, and even Nan's final denunciation of her lover - "You kill people's 'earts. You stamp them in the dust, like worms as you tread on in the fields. And under it all will be the women crying, the broken women, the women cast aside."⁴

It is interesting to note how Masefield presents a selection of realistic detail to suggest a deeper significance. This is a device characteristic of Synge, who can evoke a vision of human existence in the apparent simplicity of "the time you'll hear one cart getting off a long way in the east, and another cart

1. The Tragedy of Nan, Act. I.

2. op.cit., Act. II.

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit., Act III.

getting off a long way in the west, and a dog barking maybe, and a little wind turning the sticks."¹ In Nan the device is laboured. Dick's description of a married woman's toil lacks that passionless objectivity, that acceptance of existence which springs from character rooted in a natural simplicity which is, in itself, a natural wisdom. The effect of "And little Jainey fell in the yard, and 'ad 'er 'air mucked"² is ruined by a selfconscious emphasis of the tragic implication. "Ah! Ugh! It go to my 'eart."³ Nan's song for her father is more successful. "There was a strong man, a kind man. He was forty-nine years old. He was the best thatcher in the three counties. He was the sweetest singer. I've known teams goin' to the field stop to 'ear my dad sing."⁴ Here Nan's suffering is raising her above the bias of human passion towards a genuine spiritual understanding.

The Gaffer presents us with the strongest grounds for criticism. We can accept the gradual

1. J.M. Synge, The Well of the Saints, 1905, Act III.

2. The Tragedy of Nan, Act II.

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit., Act III.

intensification of Nan's ideas and the consequent heightening of her utterance, because this intensification springs from the nexus of her character with the dramatic event - she is truly "pushed beyond the limits of the dying personality".¹ The wisdom of the Gaffer, however, is almost wholly idiosyncratic. His function is to relate the surface and the depths of the play, but, in actual fact, his emphasis on symbolic significance outruns the dramatic presentation and wrenches the spontaneous spiritual development of Nan's character. The Gaffer's influence on Nan's spiritual growth is obtrusive, and the rival narrative of his sweetheart's tragedy does not blend happily with the outer action which gives rise to the tragedy of Nan. His use of intensified language is inherent and not dramatic; we are forced to excuse it as senile rambling.

The living poetry of Nan is a less healthy growth than the rich, spontaneous utterance of Synge's characters. We frequently suspect that Masfield is creating an illusion of an underlying, innate poetry in the people of Gloucestershire by concocting what is, in fact, a literary imagery from the features of their

1. J. Masfield, Preface to The Tragedy of Nan, 1911.

environment. There is something precious in Dick's "And their cheeks all flaggin', and sunk. And dull as toad's bellies, the colour of 'em. And their eyes be 'eavy, like a foundered old ewe's when 'er time be on 'er,"¹ and phrases from the natural idiom such as "you be lovely"² and "my white vlower done"³ are repeated with tiresome persistence. Nevertheless, though Masefield's ultimate achievement falls far below that of his Irish inspiration, we must not underestimate the importance of these early plays in the development of English poetic drama. Masefield was not only attracted to the Irish technique, but was primarily fired by the Irish outlook. The Tragedy of Nan is a genuine attempt to reconcile the realistic and the poetic in terms of a drama rooted in life.

Drinkwater's The Storm⁴ is a less successful attempt to emulate the genius of Synge. Here the impact of grief is blurred by Alice's sentimental rehearsal of the past, and the stoic resignation of Riders to the Sea

1. The Tragedy of Nan, Act II.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., Act III.

4. J. Drinkwater, The Storm, 1915, Pawns, 1917.

has degenerated into Saran's irritating pessimism. Nature here is conceived as an external force; it is not, as in Synge's plays, ingrained in the lives and minds of the characters. The result is that we are left only with a sense of catastrophe. At the close of Riders to the Sea there is no sense of waste, only a tragic jubilation of humanity recognising and accepting the power of an elemental force with which it is fundamentally akin.

The Storm is the only one of Drinkwater's poetic plays which recognises the possibility of founding a living drama on the life of the English countryside, but the influence of the Irish Dramatic Movement on the early work is so strong that it may well be classified at this point. In Copetua,¹ Rebellion,² The Good of Quiet³ and X = 0⁴ Drinkwater clearly acknowledges Yeats as his master. The underlying theme of the plays comprehends Yeats' conception of spiritual reality beneath mere

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1. J. Drinkwater, Copetua, 1911.
 2. J. Drinkwater, Rebellion, 1914.
 3. J. Drinkwater, The Good of quiet, 1916, Fawns, 1917.
 4. J. Drinkwater, X = 0, 1917, Fawns, 1917.

surface existence, and calls for the substitution of imaginative truth in place of "these little energies of law" which are but "queer motes eddying over life".¹ Drinkwater is not so pure a mystic as Yeats. In Cophetua and Rebellion he idealises human love to "a passion shining as a sword"² in the face of which kingship, victory, even death itself are but "a blown wisp on the granary floor".³ He is content, however, with this idealisation of life itself, and he does not, as does Yeats, demand the annihilation even of human passion -

Yet never have two lovers kissed but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not find it.⁴

The God of Quiet approaches more closely to Yeats' supreme mysticism. It has obvious affinities with The Hour Glass and The Unicorn from the Stars, and its dominant conception recalls Yeats' belief in the spiritual pregnancy of a void

1. Rebellion, Act I, Sc.1.
2. Cophetua
3. Rebellion, Act I, Sc.1.
4. W.B. Yeats, The Shadowy Waters, 1911.

That centre of thought where life is thrilled
 As a world of wings plying the air,
 A million pulses that beat, and build,
 Of the flowing arcs that are weaving there,
 A perfect balance - a motion due
 As ever the tides of the sea have known,
 True as the flight of a god is true,¹
 Yet sweet and still as the carven stone.

As Yeats re-raised the Irish, so Drinkwater seeks to impregnate the English drama with the spirit and form of poetry.

The early Drinkwater is essentially a lyric dramatist. Moreover, we find immediate grounds for criticism in the fact that he is lyric, not so much at the expense of action - for we can accept the substitution of spiritual motion for external event - but at the expense of character. In these plays it is the idea, and not the characters, which emerges most clearly. In Cophetua character, conflict and language are completely stylised to the lyrical expression of the underlying theme. In The God of Quiet there are no characters, only a group of representative figures giving lyrical variations on the nature of 'quiet'. Rebellion, in which Drinkwater attempts a complete nexus of character and plot, illustrates the dangers

1. The God of Quiet.

of this lyrical preoccupation. The dramatic life of the conflict is stultified by character which is neither fully stylised nor fully motivated. Phane merely exhibits qualities opposed to those of Narros, and Narros and Shubia are too much alike. We have dialogue of this nature -

Shubia: Immoderate love -

Narros: Is the grain of the thriving wood.

Shubia: You take my words.¹

in which, in place of dramatic interaction between the characters, the lyrical exposition of an idea is shared. X = O is more successful in that lyricism is organically related to a perfect image of the dramatic concept in terms of character and action. However, the exact symmetry of this image is possibly too perfect, and we are further justified in criticising a distinct tendency towards sentimentality in this play.

Written at a time when the English drama was in desperate need of poetic faith, these early plays of Drinkwater are, both in form and spirit, uncompromisingly poetic. In the face of prose realism the poet dramatist

1. Rebellion, Act II, Sc.11.

issues the challenge of spiritual truth. It must be remembered, however, that this challenge is returned. The prose drama had introduced a starkly naturalistic contemporary world into the English theatre, and the poetic drama, in order to remain a living force, was obliged to take this prosaic world into its imaginative comprehension. Drinkwater himself was among the first to realise the difficulties facing the poet dramatist in this century. After his early work in the verse medium he turned to the prose drama, attempting to reconcile poetry and realism by infusing with "the sparest prose idiom something of the enthusiasm and poignancy of verse".¹ Eliot is to approach from the opposite direction by modifying the verse form itself, but his efforts are inspired by the same interpretation of the contemporary situation.

Meanwhile Abercrombie had joined Masefield in his attempt to evolve a living poetic drama from the contemporary life of the English countryside. Abercrombie's contribution to the moving stream of the drama lies in his attempt to reconcile his heritage of drama with the needs of his age, and in his development of the

1. J. Drinkwater, Preface to Collected Plays, 1925, p. VIII.

Once there were lions, Seth, the lions of sin;
 mangy, perhaps. but still - lionish voices.¹
 And now you've shut your sins up in a box -¹

Tennyson's image is purely declamatory, divorced from actual speech and genuine emotion. Abercrombie's is fetched from everyday life and living language; moreover it dramatises the characters of both Seth and the Squire, tracing simultaneously Seth's enforced self control and the imminent eruption of the squire's smouldering lust.

The texture of these plays is reinforced with phrases and images drawn from colloquial speech and the background of the characters' lives. In Deborah, the plague has "lowpt over"² one family, while David's life is "a candle in the draught of an open door".³ The villagers in The End of the World are "like dogs in a yard",⁴ a rotten staircase is "flimsy and soft as a blanket",⁵ and the blasting of the comet is envisaged as

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1. L. Abercrombie, The Adder, 1913, Four Short Plays, 1922.
 2. L. Abercrombie, Deborah, 1912, Act I.
 3. op.cit.
 4. L. Abercrombie, The End of the World, 1914, Act I, Four Short Plays, 1922.
 5. L. Abercrombie, The Staircase, 1914, Four Short Plays, 1922.

a hand brushing up the shiny nap on a piece of cloth.¹ Since nature is a prime factor in the lives of these characters it is ingrained in their psychology, and they image themselves and others spontaneously in terms of nature and animal life. The mast is cropped from a ship "as if it were a thistle",² life in face of the imminent meteor is "a rotten toadstool kickt to flying bits",³ "a midge that a clumsy thumb squashes and smears",⁴ and laughter is "bright as sunny water".⁵ The use of natural imagery comes as easily to these rustic characters as the idea of a curlew call signal to the lovers in Deborah.

Of great significance is the essentially dramatic nature of the verbal imagery in these plays. In practice, as in theory, Abercrombie recognises the organic relationship between poetry and drama in the genuine poetic play, and it is this which sets him above the majority of the nineteenth century poet dramatists. Here every element

1. The End of the World, Act I.

2. Deborah, Act III.

3. The End of the World, Act II.

4. op.cit., Act I.

5. L. Abercrombie, The Deserter, 1922, Four Short Plays, 1922.

of form is an aspect of concept; character, action, setting and language are mutually creative in the development of the whole. Verbal imagery is a living dramatic force, eddying with the changing currents of emotion, and charged with the particular significance of personal viewpoint. We may take, for example, the imagery by which Abercrombie presents the conception of lechery in The Adder. Lust is envisaged as a dog "full of weeping sores" and "vile mange", as "poison" and as the "spiny fingers" of strangling briars; but it is also "scarlet fire", "bright wrathful wine", and a "golden trumpet" blazing into life. The equipoise of this imagery witnesses a genuine dramatic conception; the statement of the case is not ~~one-sided~~ ^{one-sided} ~~considered~~, but counterbalanced with emotional and dramatic conflict.

Abercrombie acknowledges and insists upon an organic relationship between poetry and drama and between poetic drama and life. In this age of Eliot it is difficult for us to realise the full significance of Abercrombie's achievement. His innovations are comparatively tentative, and, even while he advances on the work of the nineteenth century, he is not entirely free from that 'literary' quality which rendered the earlier poetic drama so lifeless. Nevertheless, with

Abercrombie, the poetic drama takes a great stride forward. It has begun to realise its obligations to the requirements of its own age.

In the work of Gordon Bottomley these obligations are not so finely regarded. Bottomley is generally associated with the poetic revival in England, though his imaginative integrity falls far short of that of his fellow pioneers, and his extravagant admiration for Sturge Moore¹ is no great recommendation for his own work. Of himself he says

I have found my riches and my plenty
In poets dead and poets living,²

and we suspect that this preoccupation with literature has been at the expense of imaginative experience grounded in life itself. In two of his plays, King Lear's Wife³ and Gruach⁴ he reconstructs the early lives of Shakespeare's characters. Our interest in these plays springs mainly from the foreshadowing of Shakespearian character and event - for instance in the anticipation

1. G. Bottomley, Dedication to T. Sturge Moore, King Lear's Wife and Other Plays, 1920.

2. op.cit.

3. G. Bottomley, King Lear's Wife, 1915.

4. G. Bottomley, Gruach, 1923.

of Lady Macbeth's compelling influence over her husband's actions - and, indeed, Bottomley relies heavily on Shakespearian allusion for his dramatic effect. Judged entirely in their own context the characters are neither finely drawn nor convincingly motivated, and the treatment of Lear's callousness and Gruach's idiosyncratic hatred of her relations is particularly heavy.

The themes of Bottomley's plays have little more than narrative value. Neither character nor action is an aspect of a genuine underlying poetic concept, and consequently the relationship between them and the heightened language in which they are presented is almost entirely arbitrary. The writer's use of poetic setting is frequently successful, creating atmosphere as divergent as the warmth of "the loitering cows in the brown owl-tide"² and the desolation of "the wailing of the waters of the West",³ but this is no more than static picture making, however pleasing. Where Bottomley fails is in that he does not relate his intensified imagery to a corresponding intensification of character

1. Gruach, Sc.II.

2. G. Bottomley, Midsummer Eve, 1901-2.

3. G. Bottomley, The Crier By Night, 1900.

and dramatic event, and the result is poetry which is pretentious, lacking as it does a conceptual justification. Consequently we are faced with images of this calibre, tortuously developed, but having no true dramatic life—

Circling each other so in soft enclosure,
 Loosening our folds with mutual-moving breath,
 Our wreathing seems to rustle and expand,
 As crushed, unwrinkling petals in a bud
 Widen together in unbroken touch,
 Begin a blossom's effluence, concede
 A blossom's trembling welcome to the night
 That fills it, and that it believes it fills.¹

Furthermore, Bottomley does not fetch his language from living speech, and his plays are wooden with pompous, outdated rhythms, and with literary inversions and declamations.

Suggestive of saga and historical romance, these plays make for pleasant, competent theatre which only occasionally rises to poetic drama. Theme and character are too poetry in imaginative significance to support the florescence of a poetic expression here inevitably superfluous. This is not the true dramatic way.

Meanwhile, after their early work written

1. Gruach, Sc.II.

under the direct influence of the Irish Dramatic Movement, Masefield, Abercrombie, and Drinkwater continue to experiment with dramatic form. This experimentation is in itself a sign of a healthy outlook, of an attempt to close the gap between art and contemporary living. Masefield's style is notably unsettled, a continual search for the satisfaction of his own needs and those of the twentieth century. The Tragedy of Pompey the Great¹ is an attempt to reconcile prose realism with a tragic conception of poetic intensity. The result is a fine oratory which, at its best, is the natural expression of character ennobled and intensified by the dramatic situation. Such is Cato's

There are two Romes, Metellus. One built of brick by hodsmen. But the Rome I serve glimmers in the uplifted heart; it is a court for the calm gods, that Rome. Let me not shame that city. Advance the eagles.²

The failure of the play lies in the dramatist's distinct tendency to wrest significance from insufficient dramatic provocation,³ and in the self consciousness of his hero. Pompey's nobility is inherent rather than elicited

1. J. Masefield, The Tragedy of Pompey the Great, 1910.

2. The Tragedy of Pompey the Great, Act I.

3. See especially the opening scene between Phillip and Antistia.

from the nexus of his character with the dramatic event, and, on his lips, the oratorical vein comes perilously near theatrical declamation.

In The Faithful,¹ Masefield examines the possibilities of adapting the Japanese Nōh technique, mingling an illusion of realistic speech with a ritualistic lyrical stylisation perfectly compatible with character in the psychology of which ritual is naturally ingrained. This mingling of realism and stylisation is, as we shall see,² a distinguishing feature of Masefield's religious drama. In his later work Masefield develops the use of choric commentary somewhat crudely anticipated by the closing chanty in The Tragedy of Pompey the Great. The device is employed in the religious plays, and thoroughly explored in A King's Daughter,³ in which the progress of the main event is traced by a subsidiary narrative emphasising, universalising, and finally blending with the outer action. A commenting figure of Destiny embraces the

1. J. Masefield, The Faithful, 1915.

2. See infra, pp. 79-81.

3. J. Masefield, A King's Daughter, 1923.

action of Tristan and Isolt,¹ but here we feel a strain in the attempt to evolve a deeper significance from an unconvincing action and harsh characterisation. The Spirit of Beauty which holds the stage during Mary's execution² is more successful.

The great variety of subject and method in Masefield's work is a symptom of an age struggling to find its dramatic medium. This, in itself, is significant, for it is only through such labour that the birth of a genuine contemporary drama is possible. It is very unlikely that the work of Masefield, or of Abercrombie or Drinkwater had any direct influence on Eliot, but there is no doubt that their pioneering efforts helped to prepare a moment at which Eliot's work might be possible. Progress begins with those who point out the need for it.

By 1918 Drinkwater had turned from poetic drama to those plays in which he was to infuse with "the sparest prose idiom something of the enthusiasm and poignancy of verse".³ The result is a group of pleasing

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1. J. Masefield, Tristan and Isolt, 1925.
 2. J. Masefield, End and Beginning, 1933.
 3. Preface to Collected Plays, 1925, p.VIII.

biographical plays rising at best to the fine rhetoric of Abraham Lincoln¹ and Robert E. Lee,² and sinking at worst to the gross sentimentalism of Robert Burns.³ It seems highly probable that Drinkwater's Chroniclers in Abraham Lincoln were strongly influenced by the Chorus of Spirits in Hardy's The Dynasts. However, we must draw an immediate distinction between these plays at the initial level of conception - a distinction which is confirmed by a comparison between the chaotic commentary in both. Hardy's Chorus of Spirits testifies to an intense conceptual poetry and fuses with the outer action into an imaginative unity essentially poetic. Drinkwater's Chroniclers provide a link between the action and trace its intellectual and emotional significance, but their function is chiefly to emphasise the nobility of the hero, and show that

Presiding everywhere
Upon event was one man's character.⁴

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1. J. Drinkwater, Abraham Lincoln, 1918.
 2. J. Drinkwater, Robert E. Lee, 1923.
 3. J. Drinkwater, Robert Burns, 1925.
 4. Abraham Lincoln, final chorus of Chroniclers.

The imaginative scope of Abraham Lincoln is far narrower than that of The Dynasts, and we assent to the writing of the main in prose.

In the same year in which Abercrombie's Four Short Plays were published, and ten years after his own comparatively unsuccessful Don Juan,¹ Flecker burst in upon the dramatic scene with his magnificently spectacular Hassan.² The language of this play is as highly coloured as its original production, and certainly Flecker achieved a poetic speech which is "abundant", "resonant" and "beautiful"³ as Yeats demanded. Furthermore, the success with which the playwright creates a dramatic world in which this extravagant language is as natural as the gorgeous settings impregnates his poetic utterance with "living"⁴ quality; metaphor from artificial and natural beauty, from precious stones, heady perfumes, squalor and violent death is built into the fabric of the drama, and is as spontaneous in the conversation of beggars and merchants

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1. J.E. Flecker, Don Juan, 1910-11.
 2. J.E. Flecker, Hassan, first produced at His Majesty's Theatre, with music by Delius, 1922.
 3. W.B. Yeats, The Cutting of an Agate, p.115.
 4. op.cit.

as in the rapturous swan song of Rafi and Ferraven.¹ The exotic life of the east is as deeply ingrained in the psychology of Flecker's characters as is nature in that of the characters in Synge's plays. However, Hassan is localised and unique, and its language, like that of Synge, is not available except among similar characters in a similar setting. The "Golden Road to Samarkand"² does not lead to a contemporary poetic drama in the English theatre.

After the ironical Phoenix,³ Abercrombie turned his attention to the expansion of the early single act of The Sale of Saint Thomas⁴ into a six act 'drama'.⁵ This play, and the religious drama of Masefield,⁶ and Bottomley,⁷ move in the revived stream of religious drama flowing from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the point at which it is joined by the

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1. Hassan, Act IV, Sc. II.
 2. op.cit., Act V, Sc. II.
 3. L. Abercrombie, Phoenix, 1923.
 4. L. Abercrombie, The Sale of Saint Thomas, (1 act), 1912.
 5. L. Abercrombie, The Sale of Saint Thomas, (6 acts), 1931.
 6. J. Masefield, Good Friday, 1916; The Trial of Jesus, 1925; The Coming of Christ, 1928; Easter, 1929.
 7. J. Bottomley, The Acts of St. Peter, 1933.

current of Eliot's work, after which it gathers increasing force down to the present day.

The handling of religious matter in the English drama of the first three decades of this century is notably tentative by comparison with the bold imaginative treatment of more recent years. Housman's Bethlehem¹ is merely an adaptation, by means of dialogue and choral singing, of the biblical narrative. Similarly, his later Little Plays of St. Francis² have scarcely more than narrative force. They provide a charming illustration of the wisdom and goodness of Francis, but they make no attempt to communicate profound spiritual experience, and their leisurely unfolding of the saint's life lacks genuine dramatic intensity.

Masefield's stylised religious drama is an advance on this simple narrative presentation. In these plays there is evidence of a sincere attempt to solve the problem of bringing familiar uncontemporary material into contemporary significance. By means of choral commentary the dramatist fuses the actual events of the Christian story with the timeless sufferings and

1. L. Housman, Bethlehem, 1902.

2. L. Housman, Little Plays of St. Francis, 1922.

aspirations of humanity. In Good Friday choral interpretation is closely integrated with dramatic event. The madman's awareness tends to be idiosyncratic, but it is a "Wisdom that comes from Agony",¹ providing at once a link between spiritual truth and human suffering and between human suffering and the divine passion. Furthermore, the gradual identification of the madman with Christ renders his commentary essentially dramatic, tracing as it does through the progress of the action the Saviour's anguish and final ecstasy. In The Trial of Jesus the choric device is less successful. The imaginative relationship between the choral section and the main dramatic event is not sufficiently passionate to ignite the whole into a compelling unity. The chorus broadens the significance of the action by relating it to historical event and fable, but it is parallel to rather than organically integrated with the dramatic action. It is interesting to note that, although Maasefield's achievement falls far short of Eliot's, the structure of this play is comparable with that of The Rock. Furthermore, the introduction of the figure of Wisdom, a stylised projection of Christ's

1. Good Friday, 1915.

own thought, at once looks back to medieval drama and forward to the Tempters in murder in the Cathedral.

Wisdom in The Trial of Jesus anticipates the stylised figures in The Coming of Christ. In this play, as in murder in the Cathedral, spiritual development is dramatised through discussion between the central figure and the objectifications of his mind. However, Masefield's choice of subject inevitably defeats the possibility of genuine dramatic tension. Thomas¹ is subject to human frailties, but the very nature of the Anima Christi² stultifies true dramatic modification of character. The last of this group of plays, Easter, written for singing voices, has no strong central dramatic image, and its effect is that of chorus upon chorus interpreting the resurrection in a rather pallid verse.

The three last of Masefield's religious plays are obviously influenced by the stylised drama of Yeats, and there are close affinities between them and Yeat's own Calvary.³ Calvary is a further significant

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1. T.S. Eliot, murder in the Cathedral, 1935.
 2. The Coming of Christ, 1928.
 3. W.B. Yeats, Calvary, 1920.

illustration of the movement towards fresh dramatic interpretation of a well worn theme. In this play, in which "Christ dreams His passion through",¹ the dramatist presents a bold conception of an eternal desolation surrounding the sacrifice which was doomed to partial failure. The play hinges not upon the familiar closing scene of rejoicing at the resurrection, but on the moment of supreme despair "My Father, why hast Thou forsaken me?"² The choral song of the heron - symbol of loneliness - emphasises the ever recurrent yearning in the soul of the Redeemer, and dramatises the mood of the play simultaneously substantiated by dramatic character and event. Calvary, both in conception and execution, is a great step towards a religious drama of genuine contemporary significance.

A year after Masfield's The Trial of Jesus Lawrence caused a ripple on the surface of the stream with his David.³ This play is little more than a straggling chronicle of biblical event, lacking intense dramatic unity and depth of spiritual significance.

1. Calvary

2. op.cit.

3. D.H. Lawrence, David, 1926.

Its interest lies in its language, especially in the light of our knowledge that The Rock is to be written eight years later. However, there is a significant difference between Lawrence's and Eliot's handling of traditional rhythms. The language of David based on the Authorised Version, is artificially archaic, and so completely divorced from the drama that it hinders rather than furthers dramatic development. In The Rock introit rhythms are revitalised by the living essence of emotion generated by the immediate dramatic situation; furthermore, these rhythms are fused with contemporary thought and allusion, and so grounded in life itself. We may profitably compare this weighty ornamentation -

Samuel: Behold, is the Lord my God a sutter, to
 stock the larders of Saul? Lo, he heeds
 not the fat beef nor the fine raiment,
 but threshes out his anger in the firmament.
 Amaleh has defied the living Breath, and
 cried mockery on the Voice of the Beyond.
 Therefore the living Wrath will wipe out
 the Amalehite, by the hand of his servant
 Israel. And if the Nameless is without
 compunction, whence the compunction of Saul?¹

with this living dramatic force -

What life have you if you have not life
 together?
 There is no life that is not in community,

1. David, Sc.I.

And no community not lived in praise of God.
Even the anchorite who meditates alone,
For whom the days and nights repeat the praise
of God,
Prays for the Church, the Body of Christ
incarnate.
And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads,
And no man knows or cares who is his neighbour,
Unless his neighbour makes too much disturbance.
But all dash to and fro in motor cars,
Familiar with the roads and settled nowhere.¹

Of greater significance is Abercrombie's unique dramatic experiment, The Sale of Saint Thomas, a play written partly in dialogue and partly in narrative form, its structure almost completely dependent on a highly developed symbolism. It is difficult exactly to classify Abercrombie's most ambitious dramatic work. The surface of Thomas's character is almost completely disregarded and we are faced with a dramatic paradox in that we are forced to infer the human level of existence from a direct presentation of the deeper level of spiritual understanding. Nevertheless we cannot, without qualification, define The Sale of Saint Thomas as a dramatic poem. Here idea is not fully stated in the abstract, but tested in character motivated by particular circumstance. Imagery is dramatic, fluctuating with

1. T.S.Eliot, The Rock, 1954, Pt.I.

the eddies of Thomas's emotion through fear, evasion, loathing and ecstasy. The Sale of Saint Thomas is not good theatre, but it has many of the qualities of good drama. The greatness of this play lies in Abercrombie's attempt at the dramatic communication of intense religious experience. There is here a foreshadowing of achievements yet to come.

In a much lighter vein, but of great charm, wit, and gaiety are James Bridie's Tobias and the Angel¹ and Jonah and the Whale.² These plays bring biblical narrative into contemporary significance by endowing character,-historical, supernatural and allegorical - with delightfully familiar human qualities and an illusion of everyday social intercourse. Bridie is concerned not so much with mystical truth as with human fact, and the charming irony of the plays results from his translation of spiritual experience into ordinary human terms. The dramatist exploits the surface level of the exemplary situation rather than explores its spiritual depths, and the result is brilliantly amusing

1. J. Bridie, Tobias and the Angel, 1930.

2. J. Bridie, Jonah and the Whale, 1932.

comedy with moral implication.

In the year before the first appearance of The Rock, Bottomley's The Acts of St. Peter¹ was performed in the Cathedral Church at Exeter.² A chronicle of events in the life of the saint, from the early ministry of Christ to Peter's own martyrdom, the play is lacking in the dramatic intensity which Bottomley might have achieved had he isolated one incident for imaginative treatment, as Eliot was later to do in Murder in the Cathedral. Significantly, Bottomley attempts to impose imaginative unity on his broad sequence of action by means of choral commentary, and, indeed, the structure of The Acts of St Peter may well be compared with that of The Rock. However, the function of the Chorus in Bottomley's play testifies to a less intense dramatic conception than does that of Eliot. It provides a link between the panoramic scenes, and its poetic utterance is dramatic in that it emphasises the mood evoked by the external progress of event, from the terror and despair of the crucifixion -

1. G. Bottomley, The Acts of St. Peter, 1933.

2. June 27th, 1933.

A frightened face
 At an opened door
 For a moment's space
 Behind and before
 Looks out - and there
 All, all is seen.¹

to the joy of the resurrection -

How swift the hour
 When the great Power
 Behind all things
 Lifts his dread wings.²

Nevertheless, the choral interpretation of dramatic event lacks depth and originality, and the dramatist does not succeed in communicating the timeless spiritual significance underlying his narrative. His Chorus does not, as does Eliot's, fuse uncontemporary material with contemporary existence in a poetic drama which can claim, with justification, to meet the needs of its own age. Contemporary drama has still a good deal of ground to cover.

Thus, then, through the efforts of the serious prose dramatists and the poetic pioneers, the English drama of the twentieth century had, by the time

1. The Acts of St. Peter.

2. op.cit.

that Eliot entered upon the scene, regained seriousness of purpose and a notable degree of imaginative integrity. However, an attempt to trace a direct progression through the work of the early years of this century to the achievement of Eliot is doomed to disappointment. We cannot, with justification, claim that Eliot is a natural and inevitable outcome of the English drama by which he was immediately preceded. Indeed, the audacity of Eliot's thought and technique amounts to a dramatic revolution. His greatness lies in the fact that he himself is a pioneer, breaking away from the moving stream of the drama to cut for himself, and for the playwrights of the future, a new dramatic channel.¹

Nevertheless, Eliot may, and must, be considered in relationship to his English predecessors, in that his triumph indirectly fulfils their desires, for a genuine contemporary drama, and especially in that his attitude towards contemporary dramatic development is expressive of a mood prevailing even during the earliest years of the century. The English drama, from the heritage of Ibsen to the coming of Eliot himself, and indeed, beyond this to the present day, is impregnated with a strong sense of its own destiny. The revival

1. See Chap.V.

of the serious prose drama in England, and of poetic drama through the Irish and English poetic movements, was a conscious rather than a spontaneous artistic development. Few dramatists are more keenly aware of their obligation to contemporary needs than Eliot, and it is this pioneering consciousness which which relates him to the general sense of dedication to the needs of our time. It may well be argued that the basis of this relationship - a conscious sense of need - is not so healthy as involuntary artistic affinity, and that it acknowledges the ills as well as the strength of the age. Nevertheless, determined experiment can accomplish much, and the future may build on present efforts. The work of Eliot, then, may be seen as one of the throes in the century's labour to give birth to a great and genuine contemporary drama. The drama which immediately precedes him does not adequately prepare the "moment" for his achievement, but its struggles confirm Eliot's realisation that, if a contemporary drama is to be established in the English theatre, the "moment" must be forced by the "man".¹ If Eliot is a revolutionary, the time for revolution was ripe.

1. See footnote to p.1.

CHAPTER II

The Development of Eliot from Poet into Dramatist

Eliot's concern with dramatic technique is not confined to his work written specifically for the theatre. This consuming interest in the possibilities of a contemporary verse drama is revealed several years before his first attempt at writing a play,¹ and this not only through the theory of his early dramatic criticism,² but also through the distinct dramatic tendency of his early poetry.

This early work acknowledges his inherently dramatic approach. Twenty years before the appearance of murder in the Cathedral he is to be found experimenting with the resources of character and situation, and with the possibility of a dramatic verse fitted to the requirements of his age. The presentation, in the early dramatic monologues, not simply of "disembodied thought",³ but of "characters thinking", acknowledges his power to

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1. Sweeney Agonistes, first published The New Criterion Oct. 1926, and Jan. 1927.
 2. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama' appeared in Dial as early as November, 1920. ~~and January 1927.~~
 3. J.A.Passmore, T.S.Eliot, 1934, p.11.

express "the emotional quality of thought",¹ to relate imaginative to human experience, and to effect "an interpretation of human action as well as of an individual dream."²

In attempting to establish the relationship of these initial dramatic experiments to Eliot's later verse drama, the critic must be clearly aware of the essential distinction between the poem possessed of dramatic qualities and the genuine poetic play. He must look beyond technique to imaginative concept, to the essential properties of drama and of the dramatist, and must recognise the fundamental nature of the dramatic outlook. As the true poetic play is distinguished from prose drama at the primary level of imaginative concept, so it is distinguished from the poem which employs the devices of dramatic technique. Eliot's admonition to the prose dramatist who would decorate his play with inorganic poetry applies equally to the poet who would adopt the outward technique of the dramatist, uncontrolled by a true dramatic conception - "the writer of poetic drama is not merely a man skilled in two arts and skilful

1. op.cit.

2. Ronald Peacock, The Poet in the Theatre, 1946, p.20.

to weave them together".¹ Genuine poetic drama is a "much richer design",² a distinct form of art, removed by its very conception from the poetic prose play and from the dramatic poem.

The distinction between poetry and drama may be conceived in terms of the distinction between an expression of personal experience and a purely dramatic idea. In poetry the writer's experience is directly put before his readers; he is, in every sense, "writing ... in terms of his own voice".³ In dramatic, as compared with meditative or lyric poetry, the presence of the poet is less apparent, and the communication of the artist's vision is less subjective. Nevertheless, in a dramatic poem, character and situation are used to illustrate rather than, as in true poetic drama, to substantiate the poet's imaginative conception. The poet enters into his characters but he is not replaced by them. His presence is felt in their presentation, in the tendency to analyse and judge them and their action, and in their extraordinary perception of their

1. T.S. Eliot, Preface to The Wheel of Fire, 1930, by Wilson Knight, p.XVII.

2. op.cit., p.XVIII.

3. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', Selected Prose, p.75.

relationship with other characters and with the situation. Self-awareness, fatal to the essential objectivity of genuine poetic drama, is inherent in the characters rather than spontaneously elicited from the nexus of character and plot. Furthermore, the imagery of a dramatic poem tends to be episodic and illustrative of the poet's own emotional experience, and lacks the equipoise and counterbalance resulting from the clash of personal view-point in the true verse play. It provides a full statement of the poet's case and we accept it for all time, but since it is not diffused and modified by the situation among impassioned objective characters, it lacks the immediacy of the particular. Generic truth may, and must be evolved from great poetic drama; however, it is truth, not declaimed, but arising naturally from a compelling living situation.

To discover the essential difference between the dramatic poem and the poetic play we must look deeper than at the structural level. Poetic drama is not merely a more complex architecture, a fuller exploitation of character and action, a further division of the poet's view of life among a greater number of imagined persons, employed to illustrate his philosophy. The true dramatist thinks naturally in terms of character and action; they constitute the form, which in great art, is

inevitably an aspect of concept. At the initial level of imaginative conception, the dramatist's view of life is evolved in terms of human emotion and human conflict. Ultimately, drama is a symbolic, imaging the dramatist's imaginative concept, and every element - character, action, setting, and language - itself images this concept.¹ The dramatist does not directly interfere, for, both at the conceptual and at the formal level his view of life is purely dramatic; that is, it is conceived and substantiated in objective human terms.

It is this essential objectivity in drama which distinguishes it from the more personal and subjective art forms, including the dramatic poem. In the latter, dramatic technique is used to illustrate and impress the poet's view of life. The constant mediation of the poet is revealed in the characters' inherent intense awareness of the imagery in themselves and in their situation, and the poet, further allows himself to comment on his presentation and both directly and indirectly - to pass judgement and to point moral significance.² In poetic drama character and plot is an

1. See Abercrombie, and in particular, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', 1912, English Critical Essays, twentieth century, selected by P.M. Jones, 1933, pp.252-272.

2. See infra, pp. III-13.

apparently spontaneous growth. The characters of a verse play are too deeply immersed in the action to be self-conscious, and the poetic dramatist allows his objective presentation of human conflict to speak for itself. His spiritual conception is woven into the drama, and must be elicited naturally from character and action. He may not outrun dramatic concept by arbitrarily putting his philosophy into the mouths of his characters. The distinction must be made between a direct statement of an artist's view of life, and a view of life evolved from the perception of its symbolic image in the unity and aesthetic satisfaction of the drama. However, we naturally demand an acknowledgement that, in great poetic drama, and especially in great tragedy, character does reach that point of spiritual intensification at which it becomes most nobly aware of itself, and of the imagery of its suffering and exaltation. This self-consciousness is not, however, inherent; it does not reveal the poet masquerading behind the puppetry of his invention. It is rather built into the drama, and is the inevitable outcome of the nexus of character and plot, a divine perception springing naturally from the conflict of an impassioned human reaction to experience.

In the dramatic poem, character is limited so as to illustrate rather than to image the artist's imaginative vision, and has, therefore, a tendency to be imitative, or even typed. In poetic drama, character and action are not illustrations subordinate to a governing philosophic theme. They are a symbol bodying forth the dramatic idea. The imagery of the verse play is diffused throughout the formal elements of character, plot, language and setting, and these elements, imaging the dramatic theme, have a spontaneous mutual creativeness. Character, which in poetic drama is an aspect of concept, an illusion¹ rather than an illustration, is a passionately and objectively imagined unity, an absolute, dimensional growth. The dramatic view of life is evolved naturally from the relationship of the elements in its formal expression, from the interplay between plot and character, in the way in which, in the poem, the philosophic and poetic idea is evolved through the development of verbal imagery.

In the dramatic poem, the treatment of character approaches more nearly to the manner of the

1. Used here in the sense of a substantiation of the imagination.

psychological novel than to that of true drama. It allows for leisurely descriptive presentation,¹ for half formed suggestion hinted by a single gesture or a brief, light sketch,² for idiosyncratic self awareness and self revelation.³ It does not demand, as the dramatic idea demands, an imagery of character which shall be a fully imagined unity, at once a generic symbol and a complete living human creation. The drama, by its very nature, must meet its obligation to immediacy of impression. The characters of drama must therefore be roundly developed, and must satisfy the demand of the theatre for a living present as well as for a universal image. Character in great drama must be capable of endless interpretation, but its presentation must have that objectivity, that illusion of living reality which the stage requires. "It is not for the dramatist to produce an analysed character, but for the audience to analyse the character. When the dramatist is creative, then the more creative the dramatist, the greater varieties

1. See R. Browning, 'The Flight of the Duchess', 'The Glove', 'Saul', etc.

2. See R. Browning, 'My Last Duchess', 'Fra Lippo Lippi'.

3. For example, see Abercrombie's dramatic poems, 'Blind', 'The Fools Adventure' etc. and the single act of The Sale of Saint Thomas, 1912.

of interpretation will be possible."¹

Eliot himself is the first to acknowledge the essentially objective nature of great drama. He firmly rejects the bald presentation of "the undigested 'idea' or philosophy, the 'idea-emotion'"² in the theatre. He rejects Goethe's demon because he "inevitably sends us back to Goethe. He embodies a philosophy", when he should "replace the philosophy". "Goethe has not, that is to say, sacrificed or concentrated his thought to make the drama; the drama is still a means",³ an illustration of the poet's views, rather than an embodiment of his intrinsically dramatic concept. Eliot praises Hardy's The Dynasts⁴ in that it is "essentially an attempt to present a vision, and 'sacrifices' the philosophy to the vision as all great dramas do."⁵

The dramatist must present his vision immediately. He cannot afford to interfere as a mediator between his creation and the audience. He may not allow himself the indulgence of "reflection" but he must "put into

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Comments on The Cocktail Party' World Review, New Series; No.9, November, 1949, pp.19-22.

2. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', Dial, LXIX, 5, November, 1920, p.445.

3.4. T. Hardy, The Dynasts, 1903-1908.

4.3. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.444.

5. op.cit., p.445.

statement enough to make reflection unnecessary".¹
A philosophic conception "can remain pure" only by either "being stated simply in the form of a general truth",² as it is often stated in the greatest poetry, or by being transmuted into an objective symbol so that it is "identified with the reality"³ of the author's creation. We must not, in argument, lose sight of the fact that all art is objective in that the very process of its evolution is the objectization of the artist's emotion. Drama, however, is unique in that it necessitates the complete subordination of the dramatist's personality to the imaginative presentation and to the action and utterance of his characters. Indeed "the essential is to get upon the stage this precise statement of life which is at the same time a point of view, a world; a world which the author's mind has subjected to a process of simplification. I do not find that any drama which 'embodies a philosophy' of the author's (like Faust) or which illustrates any social theory (like Shaw's) can possibly fulfil the requirements."⁴

1. op.cit., p.444.

2. op.cit., p.445.

3. op.cit., p.446.

4. op.cit.

The true dramatist must, then, subordinate his own personality in order to give life to a new creation, the characters in whose emotions and actions the dramatic conception is embodied. Since the spiritual significance of great drama is not to be stated in abstract terms, but evolved from the resolution of human conflict, the dramatist must allow character and action to speak for themselves and to comment on one another. He must not, as does the writer of a dramatic poem, speak through the lips of his characters each in turn, but must rather enter into them all simultaneously, both when they are speaking and when they are silent. In genuine drama character, action, setting and language image the dramatic idea and are mutually creative; any moral or philosophic bias on the part of the dramatist stultifies this mutual creativeness, kills spontaneous growth, and destroys the aesthetic satisfaction aroused by the perception of the emotional conflict resolved in the unity and shape of the ultimate form.

Great drama confirms the dramatist's objective approach, and his suspension of judgement. The imagery of the drama reflects the genuine dramatic, as opposed to the philosophic conception. Every one of the characters, however slight, has individual existence,

and the significance of the drama is not declaimed, but springs naturally from the action and reaction among the characters and between them and their situation. In drama, imagery is not confined to the word, but diffused throughout every element of the ultimate form. The human conflict is in itself a creative development of this imagery, an artistic symbol imaging the imaginative concept. The balance of human emotion which results in dramatic conflict is re-echoed in the verbal imagery which, in drama, is but one element in a complex whole. The drama played out on the stage is underscored by an imagery of word, a branch of the total symbolic growth. This verbal imagery is not directly expressive of a single view of life, but it undulates with the light and shade of an emotional equipoise, and mirrors the theme of emotional conflict in the character and action.

Great poetic drama evolves universal spiritual truth from particular circumstance: the imaginative intensification of the poetic conception raises the human situation to a point at which it becomes a generic symbol of fundamental, unchanging humanity. However, the poet dramatist's vision must not outrun the requirements of his medium. Spiritual insight must

evolve naturally from a particular and compelling human situation, and genuine drama, unlike the dramatic poem, demands full development of character and of progressive and unified action. The poetic drama of our time has failed us in so far as it has provided an outlet for personal spiritual conception and avoided the needs of an age struggling to express itself in the theatre. The imperative immediacy of the drama demands a poetic truth which shall acknowledge its obligation to its environment.

An examination of Eliot's creative writings at once demands and confirms the critic's distinction between the dramatic poem and the poetic play. Eliot's work is remarkable for its inherent tendency towards the dramatic. The early poetry reveals him continually experimenting with dramatic technique, employing the resources of character, dramatic situation and setting, and working towards a verse medium capable of contemporary requirements. However, we must not regard this early dramatic poetry as abortive fragments of poetic drama. Our appreciation of ultimate form must be based on a healthy understanding of initial concept; we must, in practice as in theory, make the sympathetic distinction between "the impulse to write a play", and the "wish

to experiment in the writing of dramatic verse".¹ The early poems have dramatic qualities, but they are not, nor do they attempt to be, true drama. They are rather expressions of a purely personal experience in which the poet has employed the devices of dramatic technique. The underlying concept is poetic, not dramatic, and dramatic device is made to serve the ends of poetry. Eliot is "writing lyric poems; but he is using his material for them in the manner of the dramatist".² The "manner of the dramatist" is not necessarily synonymous with the conception of the dramatist. Drama, as we have seen,³ goes deeper than the structural level.

The dramatic effect of the early poetry is immediately indebted to Eliot's skill in characterisation. These early characters are broad and striking, suggesting, in small space, wide implication and generic significance. The critic must not, however be misled by a superficial illusion of dimensional imaginative unity. The analogy between a single bold stroke of character portrayal and the pen sketch is worn threadbare, but its application here is none the less helpful. The characters of the

1. Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot, 1949, p.132.

2. Hugh Ross Williamson, The Poetry of T.S. Eliot, 1932, p.66.

3. See supra, pp. 90-102

dramatic poems are pen sketches; they lack the colour, depth, and rounded development of character in true drama; their effect is cogent and immediate, but they are rigorously limited by, and drawn in as bold, flat illustration to, the governing poetic conception.

For example, in the presentation of his insistent theme of the decay of spiritual perception beneath the inanities of contemporary living, Eliot frequently employs character to intensify the concept of spiritual degeneracy. Character thus employed has no dramatic independence. It is frequently typed, a broad representative of modern society, a pointed illustration creating atmosphere, and implying, by contrast, the values of the ever present poet. The women who

Come and go
Talking of Michelangelo¹

and she who fatuously repeats

That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all²

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', Collected Poems, 1909-1935, p.11.
 2. op.cit., p.15.

or inanely complains "How you do degress!"¹ have no significance beyond a symbol of a vacuous society blinded to imaginative sensibility. With characteristic economy, Eliot brushes in a smug and futile contemporary living in flat, illustrative strokes of human typification. Frequently he limits himself to a single observed impression, but an impression which is ~~actually~~ ^{acutely} relevatory of the person under observation. Character is created by a mere gesture, a typical attitude or reaction, a fragment of conversation. There is a powerful precision in his note that "Grishkin has a maisonnette",² that Aunt Helen's dogs

Were handsomely provided for,
But shortly afterwards the parrot died too,"³

that in Pipit's room

Views of the Oxford Colleges
lay on the table, with the knitting"⁴

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Conversation Galante', Collected Poems, 1909-1935, p.33.
 2. T.S. Eliot, 'Whispers of Immortality', op.cit., p.53.
 3. T.S. Eliot, 'Aunt Helen', op.cit., p.29.
 4. T.S. Eliot, 'A Cooking Egg', op.cit., p.44.

The sordid being of Sweeney, spreading his knees, and "letting his arms hang down to laugh",¹ or "shifting from nam to nam"² in his bath, is revealed through momentary gesture. Madame de Tornquist characterises herself merely by "shifting the candles"³ in a darkened room; Fraulein von Kulp by turning for an instant in the hall, "one hand on the door".⁴ A whole facet of society is suggested in the single phrase "go south in winter",⁵ and an isolated image - "a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon", exactly places "dowager Mrs. Phibaccus, and Professor and Mrs. Cheetah".⁶

At this point the critic may profitably recall Eliot's own estimate of character in genuine poetic drama - "It is not for the dramatist to produce an analysed character, but for the audience to analyse the character. When the dramatist is creative, then the more creative the dramatist, the greater varieties

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales', op.cit., p.57.
 2. T.S. Eliot, 'Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service', op.cit., p.55.
 3. T.S. Eliot, 'Gerontion', op.cit., p.37.
 4. op.cit.
 5. T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', op.cit., p.61.
 6. T.S. Eliot, 'Mr. Apollinax', op.cit., p.31.

of interpretation will be possible. There are more resources in the characters of Shakespeare than in most of the personages of modern prose drama, and the ways of interpreting them are endless."¹ We should search in vain if we were to demand such interpretive "resources" in the characters of Eliot's dramatic poems. Here the greatness of the writer lies in his power to concentrate his poetic concept of humanity into a symbolic illustration. The characters thus created have no independent life. They are completely subordinated to the poetic conception, and they therefore lack the dimensional spontaneity of character in true drama. The creative impulse behind them is poetic, not dramatic. Poetic concept does not demand the immediate present of the particular situation and the particular individual. The recurrent truth of humanity is uttered by the poet directly, and not, as in drama, gradually evolved. The poet's characters are true for all time, but have not necessarily, as have the dramatist's, a simultaneous unique existence. The truth of this serves to explain the markedly typed characters in Eliot's early dramatic poems. Sweeney has a host of relations with a

1. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', World Review, Nov. 1949, pp.19-22.

remarkably strong likeness; Miss Nancy Ellicott, hunting, smoking, and dancing "all the modern dances",¹ is every inane modern woman; Mrs Turner, intimating "it does the house no sort of good"² is the eternal landlady eternally standing with her hands on her hips. All the world over, some prostitute "yawns and draws a stocking up",³ at every fair some Madame Sosostri⁴ plies her crystal, and, every night, while Bill and Lou and May⁵ re-enact their scene in the public house, some "young man carbuncular" makes his timeless approaches on the divan piled up with "stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays".⁶

It must not be supposed, even in the longer dramatic scenes which he introduces into his poetry, that Eliot is struggling to give birth to drama. The ultimate issue springs from a successful poetic conception; it is not a malformed or stunted dramatic

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Cousin Nancy', Collected Poems, 1909-1935, p.30.
 2. T.S. Eliot, 'Sweeney Erect', op.cit., p.43.
 3. T.S. Eliot, 'Sweeney, Among the Nightingales', op.cit., p.57.
 4. 'The Waste Land', op.cit., p.62.
 5. op.cit., p.67.
 6. op.cit., p.70.

growth. The dramatic situations in the early poems are, like the characters, entirely dependent on the poetic idea. Like the characters they have the inherent timelessness of poetry rather than the elicited universality of the drama. Their immediate impact is that of the representative, and not, as in drama, of the symbolic particular. Situation, like character, is typed. Every day the sordid little affairs are played out at Margate and Richmond;¹ the happenings in Mrs Turner's lodging house² and the Lady's social sanctuary³ are rehearsed; the same crowd, armed with sandwiches, waits for the procession to go by.⁴ These scenes are significant in that they illustrate the poet's concept of the vacuity and futility of life at the surface level, a futility only to be overcome by the realisation and pursuit of the greater spiritual values. They impress upon the reader the horrors of spiritual blindness, of a life "measured out ... with coffee spoons"⁵

1. 'The Waste Land', op.cit., p.72.

2. 'Sweeney Erect', op.cit., p.43.

3. T.S.Eliot, 'Portrait of a Lady', op.cit., pp.16-20.

4. T.S.Eliot, 'Coriolan', op.cit., p.136.

5. 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', op.cit., p.11.

and regulated by "tea and cakes and ices",¹

The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.²

They emphasise the terror in the deceptively amiable thought that every afternoon is saved for someone,³ and suddenly

One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms.⁴

Thus then, both character and action in these early poems lack the independent and spontaneous life of the true drama. Their significance is not built in and naturally evolved from their mutual inter-reaction. It is pointed by a power set apart and bringing judgement to bear upon person and event. Everything is viewed through the eye of the poet. We are shown just that facet of character and slant on situation which precisely and cogently illustrates the poet's idea. Character

1. op.cit., p.13.

2. 'The Waste Land', op.cit., p.65.

3. 'Portrait of a Lady', op.cit., p.16.

4. 'Preludes', op.cit., p.21.

is real only for that brief moment in which it embodies the poetic conception; it cannot grow because it has no dramatic life, no roots in true dramatic concept. Mrs Turner, Sweeney, the Lady, Mrs Porter, Pipit, are brilliantly executed, but they remain static illustration to a developing poetic theme. As absolute dramatic growth they are sterile. Similarly, situation is presented as illustrative tableaux rather than as living development. Immediate and particular action, capable of organic development, is frozen into a timeless attitude, vivid within its limits as illustration, but dependent for its reality on its relationship with poetic concept. The scenes in the public house, restaurant and boudoir are significant only in so far as they throw light on the poetic idea.

Our acknowledgement, in a study of Eliot's dramatic poetry, of this constant reference back to the poet and the poetic conception, confirms us in our essential differentiation, at the conceptual level, between the dramatic poem and poetic drama. In drama, character, action, setting, and verbal imagery are all aspects of the dramatic concept, are left to comment upon one another, and are mutually creative. In the dramatic poem they are in the employ of the poetic concept, and the mediation of the poet does not allow the objective

presentation to speak for itself. Our ultimate impression of character and situation in the dramatic poem is moulded, with a more or less degree of subtlety, by the prompting of the poet. In a lesser artist this prompting becomes a disproportionate and inorganic clamour of personal commentary, ~~and moralisation~~. In the work of Eliot it is diffused, not only throughout the actual creation of the dramatic content, but also through its presentation.¹ It takes the form of insidious grouping and lighting, of delicate arrangement of dramatic material against the background of the poetic theme. The presence of the poet is apparently unobtrusive; we seldom see him directly, but we are constantly made to look through his eyes.

In the dramatic poem, our final impression of character is the vision of the poet, and is not born naturally of our perception of the objective dramatic presentation. We do not, as in drama, enter with the dramatist into all the characters simultaneously. We approach them one at a time, and regard them from the standpoint of the poet. This standpoint is at times removed, a place from which the author may pass

1. See supra, p. 94

detached judgement on the persons of his creation; at other times it is within their very souls, and the poet utters himself through their own lips. But always it is the poet's voice, the poet's viewpoint, the poet's judgement; - this is not the dramatic way.

Since Eliot's dominant poetic conception involves the contrast between spiritual awareness and spiritual decay, his characters tend to fall naturally into two groups - those which are viewed completely from the outside, and those revealed entirely from within. For example, we may take the briefly sketched, strongly typed characters which Eliot employs as symbols of contemporary spiritual degeneracy. As we have shown,¹ these characters are used to exemplify poetic concept, and in the moment of exemplification they are vivid and true. However, beyond this moment, they have no independence, no human truth. They are not individuals; they have no human reality. Mrs Turner² is nothing more than a type of the landlady, Miss Ellicott³ a type of the fatuous modern woman.

1. See supra, pp. 106-7

2. 'Sweeney Erect', Collected Poems, 1909-1935, p.43.

3. 'Cousin Nancy', op.cit., p.30.

Arthur Edward Cyril Parker is appointed telephone
operator
At a salary of one pound ten a week rising by
annual increments of five shillings
To two pounds ten a week; with a bonus of thirty
shillings at Christmas
And one week's leave a year.¹

The human being behind this automatum of society might well have provided a subject for drama had drama been Eliot's intention. Here, however, Arthur Edward Cyril Parker is significant only in so far as he represents a **blind**, mechanical working day, the countless unthinking masses whose horizon is bounded by football pools and the holiday at Southend. As we have shown, characters such as Grishkin,² Mrs Forter and her daughter,³ Mrs Cammel,⁴ and even Sweeney have no genuine dramatic reality; they exist only in relationship to the poetic concept. Moreover, the poetic concept is dependent on their dramatic sterility. The writing of these characters only at the surface level is entirely deliberate. Eliot wishes to create an impression of an almost robot

1. 'Coriolan', op.cit., p.137.

2. 'Whispers of Immortality', op.cit., pp.53-4.

3. 'The Waste Land', op.cit., pp.63-9.

4. 'Gerontion', op.cit., p.39.

society, in which any faint stir of spiritual awakening is a thing unfamiliar, and therefore to be feared and repressed. This impression inevitably relies upon characters completely lacking in the interest of personality. The flat, blank typifications of the early poetry deliberately exclude any suggestion of individual consciousness.

The power of these early poems is dependent on sudden and forceful contrast between spiritual blindness and spiritual awareness. Frequently this contrast is analogous with the violent jarring of vacuous character against genuine and permanent values. The significance of 'Cousin Nancy' lies in the unexpected introduction of

Matthew and Waldo, guardians¹ of the faith,
The army of unalterable law,

into an inane and futile society. In some the falling evening wakens "the appetities of life",² but Cousin Harriet only stretches out her hand for the Boston Evening Transcript. The struggling consciousness of

1. 'Cousin Nancy', op.cit., p.30.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Boston Evening Transcript', op.cit., p.28.

one participant in the 'Conversation Galante'¹ is constantly rebuffed by the self-satisfied vacuity of the other. The poet cries

Faint me a cavernous waste shore
Cast in the unstilled Cyclades.²

The world replies as

Gesture of orang-outang
Rises from the sheets in steam,

and Sweeney "broadbottomed, pink from nape to base"³ prepares himself to shave. Into the thoughtless commonplaces of a mechanical existence the poet sends the cry of the stirring spirit. The conventional leavetakings outside the pub lead us unexpectedly upon a moment of truth

Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good
night, good night.⁴

An everyday request is suddenly illuminated with the pathos of a world struggling in spiritual darkness -

1. 'Conversation Galante', op.cit., p.33.
2. 'Sweeney Erect', op.cit., p.42.
3. op.cit.
4. 'The Waste Land', op.cit., p.67.

Please, will you
 Give us a light?
 Light¹
 Light.¹

Clearly, character and situation is here employed to exemplify a poetic idea; the effect on the reader is entirely dependent on the interplay between this character and situation and the remaining poetic context.

In direct contrast to the deliberate spiritual lifelessness of these purely illustrative characters is the highly developed and dramatically abnormal sensitivity of those characters into which the poet himself enters and through which he himself speaks. Here the mediation of the poet is more obvious, shattering the essential objectivity of the drama. His presence is insistent in the idiosyncratic self-consciousness of some of his characters. We may take, as an outstanding example, Prufrock's² quite extraordinary perception of himself and of his relationship to others. This character is endowed with the power to step beyond his own being and from there to observe that being's truth. He is able to see himself as others see him - "They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!'"³ as he wishes

1. 'Coriolan', op.cit., p.136.

2. 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock', op.cit., pp.11-15.

3. op.cit., p.12.

others to see him, "My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin",¹ and as he really is - the nervous, "at times, indeed, almost ridiculous"² little man "with a bald spot in the middle of my hair";³ not "Prince Hamlet", but

An attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two.⁴

The stirring spirit within him gives him no joy, but only the anguish of clearly perceiving the ludicrous humanity which imprisons it

Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
-- how should I begin
To spit out all thy butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?⁵

He has not "the strength to force the moment to its crisis";⁶ the crying spirit trails off into the whimperings of a creature pathetically deriding its own

1. op.cit.

6. op.cit., p.14

2. op.cit., p.15

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit.

5. op.cit., pp.12-13.

absurdity.

I grow old ... I grow old ...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.¹

Prufrock is not a genuine dramatic character. He is not imagined as an independent unity, an objective substantiation of a dramatic conception. His spiritual intensity is inherent, and not the outcome of human conflict and passionate human experience. Macbeth endures the torments of hell before he reaches the point of spiritual refinement at which he can view life with the dispassion which is "passion spent".² The realisation that "life's but a walking shadow"³ is evolved from the nexus of character and plot in human agony. It is with an almost impartial insight that Prufrock observes in passing "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons".⁴ Spiritual truth is here declaimed, not hard won from the genuine drama of human suffering. Eliot enters into his character, and yet

1. op.cit., p.15.

2. Samson Agonistes.

3. Macbeth, Act V, Sc.IV.

4. 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock', op.cit., p.12.

retains the vision of a poet. It is because he sees himself with the eyes of this poet within him that Prufrock is able to penetrate so deeply into his own truth.

In 'Portrait of a Lady'¹ and 'Conversation Galante'² the introduction of two characters and the suggestion of dialogue is not indicative of an embryonic drama. Spiritual significance is not built into an objectively imagined situation but in both cases, is openly declared through the abnormal awareness of one of the characters. In 'Conversation Galante' the possibility of dramatic reality is stultified by the initial conception of the speakers. Intercourse between super sensitivity and exaggerated vacuity must necessarily be barren. The conversation illustrates the poet's conception by the violent contrast of social and spiritual consciousness, but this static contrast is dramatically sterile. The speakers establish no point of contact. The significance of the situation is not elicited naturally from its development, but pointed by the speaker, who so obviously is the poet. Similarly, in 'Portrait of a Lady', the poet is transmitting personal

1. Collected Poems, 1909-1935, pp.16-20.

2. op.cit., p.33.

experience, and our view of the situation coincides exactly with his vision. We do not, as in drama, enter into both characters simultaneously and reach, with them, a spontaneous spiritual awareness. Rather we are enveloped by the inherent awareness of one of the characters, and made to accept his view of the other character, and of the situation in which, in true drama, both they and we would be unselfconsciously involved. The initial setting of the scene which will "seem" to "arrange itself" into "an atmosphere of Juliet's tomb"¹ puts a bias on our judgement. The lady herself is revealed entirely from the point of view of her companion. Her fragmentary discourse is carefully selected into an impression of cultural and social affectation,

So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul
Should be resurrected only among friends
- - - - -
You do not know how much they mean to me, my friends,
- - - - -
Without these friendships - life, what couchemar!²

His reactions, which we share, endow her with a compliance at once pathetic and contemptible. She has no inner

1. 'Portrait of a Lady', op.cit., p.16.

2. op.cit., pp.16-17.

reality; only the outward shell of an aging and inane woman clinging to the younger man through whose eyes she is seen. He, on the other hand, is only revealed subjectively, or mockingly objectified by his own bitterness into a caricature of his outward self -

You will see me any morning in the park
Reading the comics and the sporting page.¹

Like Frufrock, he is endowed with an innate consciousness of himself and his relationship to the circumstances. He is keenly aware of the superficial absurdity of the situation and of the tragedy of its underlying truth. He perceives himself clearly on the surface level, embarrassed and anxious to escape -

My smile falls heavily among the bric-à-brac

I feel like one who smiles, and turning small remark
Suddenly, his expression in a glass,²

He passes beyond the deliberate facade of his being to a deeper truth, "recalling things that other people have desired",³ and the thought of death applies a sense

1. op.cit., p.18.

2. op.cit., p.19.

3. op.cit.

of human tragedy even to that superficial futility which his spiritual awareness has despised - "and should I have the right to smile?"¹ Here there is no true drama; dramatic device is wholly subservient to the controlling hand of the presenter. What we are witnessing is not an objective dramatic image, but a poetic vision.

In 'Gerontion'² Eliot is openly exploring the soul of character. Gerontion has a complete self-consciousness which destroys any possibility of dramatic tension. His soliloquy is entirely abstract and subjective, and entirely undramatic. It is a timeless revelation arising from no immediate and particular experience. Gerontion is a generic symbol having no personal existence and could not therefore meet the demands of the theatre, for an immediate present on which to build universal significance. He is any

Old man in a draughty house
Under a windy knob.³

1. op.cit., p.20.

2. 'Gerontion', op.cit., pp.37-39.

3. op.cit., p.38.

but he has been granted a poet's insight into his own truth. He has an abnormally acute awareness of himself and the imagery of his being, standing apart from his own existence -

I an old man
A dull head among windy places -¹

and passing beyond it to a prophetic insight into human and spiritual reality. He has been entered by the poet and divinely inspired, but he remains merely the poet's mouthpiece. As an objective human creation he does not exist.

We may take as a further illustration the scene from 'A Game of Chess'² in 'The Waste Land'. Here again the entry of the poet into his characters endows them with a momentary spiritual intensification, leading an innocuous conversation into the sudden terrors of unexpected perception -

'I never know what you are thinking. Think'
I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.
- - - - - 'What shall we do tomorrow?
What shall we ever do?'³

1. op.cit., p.37.

2. 'The Waste Land', op.cit., pp.64-66.

3. op.cit., pp.65-66.

This is not the spontaneous consciousness of the drama, the dispassionate understanding born of the agonies of human labouring. There is here an element of hysterical shock as character becomes a puppetry shaken by the unlooked for inspiration of a divine poetic fury. Here, as in 'Prufrock', 'Portrait of a Lady', and 'Gerontion' the moment of truth leads us away from character towards the poetic inspiration. At this moment the humanity of the characters in the dramatic poems becomes a pitiful absurdity and we would reject it. In true drama it is from the action and suffering of this humanity that spiritual understanding is evolved, and, because of this, we accept the whole man into the new found truth; then, indeed, what we have is "a kind of humble shadow or analogy of the Incarnation, whereby the human is taken up into the divine".¹

As we have seen, the introduction of a more complex structure is not necessarily an indication of the development from the dramatic poem into genuine poetic drama.² Sweeney Agonistes³ most certainly

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', Adam, XVII, 200, Nov.1949, p.12.
 2. See supra, p. 93
 3. T.S. Eliot, Sweeney Agonistes, 1926. See infra, Chap.III, pp. 165-172

acknowledges Eliot's "wish to experiment in the writing of dramatic verse",¹ but that it originates from "the impulse to write a play"² is less certain. The essential conflict and the consequent spiritual modification of genuine drama is here stultified at the very level of conception. The theme of Sweeney Agonistes is purely static, dependent for dramatic effect on the violent but sterile contrast between different levels of understanding. The prevailing idea is that of spiritual decay, a conception dominant throughout the dramatic poems, and its presentation here is a fuller exploitation of the method employed in the poetic writings. Once again the characters separate into those written completely on the surface and the one who is endowed with an inherent intensified perception. Doris and Dusty and their boyfriends reveal a remarkable family likeness to Mrs Porter,³ Mrs Turner,⁴ Miss Ellicott⁵ and the nameless typist and her lover.⁶ They are sketched

1. Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S.Eliot, 1949, p.132.

2. op.cit.

3. 'The Waste Land', Collected Poems, 1909-1935, p.68.

4. 'Sweeney Erect', op.cit., p.43.

5. 'Cousin Nancy', op.cit., p.30.

6. 'The Waste Land', pp.69-70.

in as flat illustration whereby the poet creates an impression of a soulless, vapid contemporary society. The poet's conception demands that Sweeney's companions shall have no human reality, and living drama is therefore inevitably stillborn. The gathering in Doris's flat is a hideous group of mechanical figures symbolising an age of spiritual decay. The telephone has as much human reality as these terrible robots, and its repetitive jingle is no more senseless than their inane conversational commonplaces.

Dusty: Well what you going to do?

Telephone: Ting a ling ling
Ting a ling ling.

Dusty: That's Pereira

Doris: Yes that's Pereira

Dusty: Well what you going to do?¹

There is a moment of tremendous dramatic impact when the drunken Sweeney suddenly introduces the fearful reality of "birth, and copulation, and death"² into the vapid platitudes of the conversation. Nevertheless, a dramatic moment, however effective, does not constitute drama.

1. Sweeney Agonistes, 'Fragment of a Prologue'.

2. op.cit., 'Fragment of an Agon'.

Beyond the moment there is no dramatic development, for no communication is established either between Sweeney and his acquaintances or between Sweeney the man and the faint resurgence of spiritual insight within him. The 'play' becomes a nightmare of repetition in which Sweeney reiterates the horror of a guilt which he has not the power to redress. The ending of the fragments leaves the characters exactly as they were; there has been no dramatic modification.

The fault lies at the level of conception, which is not truly dramatic. The underlying concept of the fragments is the underlying poetic concept of the dramatic poems. Here Eliot is not thinking in terms of human passion and human conflict, but merely employing the dramatic device of character and dialogue to illustrate a personal experience. Sweeney Agonistes makes a step towards drama in that it is more fully objectified than any of the early dramatic poems. Nevertheless, it remains merely a projection of an essentially poetic idea. It is, at best, a poetic concept cast in a dramatic mould. Without a semblance of human reality there can be no true drama. Sweeney's companions are no more than a set of exemplary attitudes, and Sweeney himself has the idiosyncratic self awareness of an alien poetic power

within him. Human truth is not elicited from human intercourse. Spiritual understanding is declaimed in the abstract, not wrested in triumphal agony from the suffering of a humanity reaching beyond the confines of its nature.

It is difficult to assess the value of The Rock¹ in Eliot's dramatic development because of the circumstances under which it was written, and because it does not claim to be poetic drama in the true sense.² Indeed, "strictly speaking, The Rock is a pageant, not a drama. That is to say, its situation does not give rise to any intense struggle or conflict, its structure consists of a series of scenes of a related tone."³ However, it is important to notice that it is in this pageant that Eliot first relates spiritual understanding to particular human event. Admittedly the selection and compilation of this event from many periods of history readily and, indeed, inevitably, lends them to cosmic interpretation. Nevertheless it is significant that the poet acknowledges the dramatist's essential

1. The Rock, 1934.

2. See Chap. III, p. 172 ff.

3. F.O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot, 1947, p. 161.

obligation to an immediate human existence as well as to a permanent human truth. The form of the pageant and the propagandist purposes for which it was written result in a series of tableaux of a somewhat inferior intellectual appeal, and in fact the human drama, in so far as it merits this courtesy, is after the manner of the popular historical play. Nevertheless, it is in this work that we discover the new born dramatist, and the greatness of Eliot's achievement lies in the Choruses which link human event. Here at last, we have not only great poetry, but great dramatic poetry; poetry which forms a "musical pattern" dependent on the "action" of the drama and which "intensifies our excitement by reinforcing it with feelings from a deeper and less articulate level".¹ The Choruses to The Rock do not declaim an abstract truth, but dramatise, through poetry, the progress of human event by tracing its spiritual significance. Reality is at length naturally evolved from actuality.

Where The Rock fails as poetic drama is in the imperfect organic integration between the Choruses and the rest of the play. Spiritual significance is

1. T.S. Eliot, 'The Need for Poetic Drama', The Listener, Nov.25th, 1936, p.994.

elicited from an objective presentation but it is not built into it. The Chorus itself is not involved in the course of events, but stands removed as spectator, commentator and judge. The "musical" and dramatic "patterns" are parallel rather than inextricably interwoven, and cosmic implication is crystallised into interpretive commentary rather than diffused throughout the whole work. Nevertheless, in The Rock, Eliot the poet had taken a great stride towards Eliot the poet dramatist. A stride which led him to Canterbury for a far greater and more truly dramatic play.

The ultimate form of murder in the Cathedral¹ is true poetic drama, an image of a genuine dramatic conception.² Here, for the first time, Eliot is thinking directly and spontaneously in terms, not only of verbal imagery, but also of human character and human action. Character and situation are no longer static and episodic exemplification of a poetic idea. They are the formal substantiation of the dramatic concept, and they develop with the mutual creativeness of living imagery. In this play there is organic interaction between the

1. Murder in the Cathedral, 1935.

2. See Chap. III, p. 189. ff.

various aspects of conceit. Action is dependent upon character and character is in turn modified by action. The fundamental human reality imaged in the nexus of character and plot is simultaneously imaged in words, - that is, the "musical" and dramatic "patterns" of the play are inter dependent with the interdependence of living organism. The "double pattern in great poetic drama"¹ has been achieved, "not by a concurrence of two activities, but by the full expansion of one and the same activity".² Eliot has developed from poet into dramatist.

In this play, the greatness of Eliot's achievement is to be measured by the writing of the Chorus in which at once the finest poetry and the most intense drama lies. Poetry here is great dramatic poetry, for it exactly images the essence of the imaginative conception played out in the spiritual conflict and ultimate martyrdom of Thomas; it is entirely functional, dramatizing the progress of the spirit through suffering and doubt to the final triumph.

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', Selected Prose, p.73.
 2. T.S. Eliot, 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', Selected Essays, p.52.

Above all, spiritual intensity is here built into the very fabric of the drama. The Chorus to The Rock was a group of remote spectators interpreting the scene in terms of universal implication: the women of Canterbury are emotionally involved in the witnessed presentation, and their lives and understanding are consequently modified by the development of dramatic event. The Chorus are conscious of themselves only as witnesses to circumstance. That noble awareness of their own truth, which is the mark of great poetic drama, is spontaneously born within them even while they shrink from spiritual disturbance. They are the ordinary folk who "did not wish anything to happen",¹ but, even against their will, they are exalted by the action of the drama through the human agony of hopelessness and terror to that point of spiritual intensity at which they realise and acknowledge their own reality in a cry of self abnegation and praise

We praise Thee O God, for thy glory displayed in all
the creatures of the earth,

Forgive us, O Lord, we acknowledge ourselves as type
of the common man,

1. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.II.

That the sin of the world is upon our heads; that the
 blood of the martyrs and the agony of the saints
 is upon our heads.
 Lord, have mercy upon us.¹

This, at last, is "a kind of humble shadow or analogy of
 the incarnation, whereby the human is taken up into the
 divine".²

In Murder in the Cathedral Eliot satisfies,
 more fully than ever before, the drama's demand for
 objectivity. His projection of Thomas's own doubts into
 the brilliant characterisation of the Tempters, and the
 subsequent translation of the various approaches of the
 Tempters into the worldly terms of the knights is masterly.
 His failure lies in his hero. Thomas does not establish
 himself in our sympathies as a human being struggling to
 overcome the limitations of his humanity. His inherent
 spiritual insight sets him above the plane of ordinary
 human understanding, and his moment of doubt is so inward
 a conflict that we can scarcely realise it. Thomas does
 not arrive at his own truth through a superb awareness of
 himself as an acting and suffering being. Spiritual
 perfection is achieved by a nice modification in character

1. op.cit.

2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', Adam XVII, 200, Nov.1949,
 p.12.

which is, at least from the raising of the curtain, innately and almost purely spiritual. This is not, as is the magnificent development in the attitude of the Chorus, the human exaltation which we demand of great poetic drama. Nevertheless, Murder in the Cathedral is a genuine poetic play, and it has dramatic greatness. We may now confidently claim Eliot's right to the ^{title of} ~~little~~ poetic dramatist.

The Family Reunion¹ is a comparative failure.² In taking a step forward as a pioneer of contemporary dramatic form Eliot takes a step backward as a poetic dramatist. The root of the trouble lies in his failure in this play to think simultaneously, and with equal intensity, in terms of poetry, character and plot. The entire action of the play takes place on a spiritual level, and, significantly, the dramatist does not satisfy his obligation to relate the origin and the consequence of this spiritual development to the impact of character and event. The spiritual conception is imperfectly projected into an "objective correlative", a "set of objects, a situation, a chain of events"³ which shall image

1. The Family Reunion, 1939.

2. See Chap. III, p. 229. fl1.

3. T.S. Eliot, 'Hamlet', Selected Essays, p. 145.

it exactly and move simultaneously with the verbal imagery. Indeed the verbal imagery, far from rising naturally from the situation in which it is declaimed, frequently expresses an unbecoming impatience with a situation which taints the purity of its abstraction. Furthermore, the dramatist does not succeed in expressing the spiritual climax of the play in terms of dramatic action. Thomas's martyrdom was magnificent; Harry's departure is almost ludicrous. The lack of mutual creativeness between the dramatic event and the utterance of spiritual significance has the serious consequence of fine poetry which is nevertheless undramatic. The greatest poetry in the play is to be found in passages "so remote from the necessity of the action that they are hardly more than passages of poetry which might be spoken by anybody".¹

The failure to establish a convincing interaction between the outer and the inner dramatic development is marked by the consequent absence of immediate human reality in the characters. The conception of character in this play looks back to the dramatic poems and to Sweeney Agonistes. Once again we have the familiar

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.80.

grouping into spiritually deceased typifications and spiritually precious eccentricities. The aunts and uncles, as individuals, have no inner reality, and Harry, Mary and Agatha no credible outer existence. No intercourse is established between the two levels of understanding and the play is barren of that spontaneous spiritual development which we demand of great poetic drama.

On each of the two levels of understanding the projection of idea into character is so inadequate that its relationship to spiritual content is indicative of a poetic rather than a truly dramatic conception. The aunts and uncles are no more than illustration to a theme familiar in the earlier poetry. Mary, Agatha and Harry are, at their most intense moments, entered by a power from without inspiring them to oracular utterance by which they themselves are almost ridiculously surprised. Neither character nor plot has that independent and spontaneous life indicative of a healthy dramatic growth. The Family Reunion fails in that it lacks the essential objectivity of genuine drama.

With the writing of his next play Eliot reaches the height of his dramatic development. The Cocktail Party¹

1. T.S. Eliot, The Cocktail Party, 1949.

is his greatest achievement to date, revealing in both the dramatist's choice and treatment of subject the confidence and expert handling of the master.¹ The dramatic theme - self knowledge and the reality of human existence - is here imaged perfectly, "by the full expansion of one and the same activity",² in every aspect of concept. Character, plot and language are interdependent and mutually creative. The external action of the play sets in motion the questioning which leads at length to self realisation, and this knowledge is in turn transmuted back into terms of human action. Thus spiritual awareness is naturally evolved from dramatic event, and the verbal imagery through which it is expressed is organically related to the simultaneous imagery of character and plot. The dramatic and musical patterns chime in that complex harmony, that "much richer design"³ which is great and true poetic drama.

Moreover, the characters in this play acknowledge the essential dimensional imaginative unity demanded by drama. The sharp, crude contrast between the spiritually

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1. See Chap.III, p.249.f11.
 2. 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', Selected Essays, p.52.
 3. T.S. Eliot, Preface to The Wheel of Fire, by Wilson Knight, 1930, p.XVIII.

blind and the prophetically inspired is here eased into a natural gradation of spiritual capacity compatible with actual human experience. Each gives and is given according to his capacity, and every character is naturally modified by the dramatic situation. Each is an integrated whole existing both on the surface and at the depths of the play. Above all, each is convincing as a human being and resolves the intensification of spiritual consciousness in terms which we, as human beings, can appreciate. In Celia's ultimate sacrifice the mounting spirit is traced, not by the rapturous self-utterance of the climax to The Family Reunion, but in the human reality of the scene among the dying natives. It is at such a moment that drama performs its supreme function of presenting humanity triumphing over itself, and, indeed, the "human is taken up into the divine".¹

Architecturally, The Confidential Clerk² is Eliot's most ambitious and successful play. The imaging of the spiritual theme in terms of character and plot is handled with a mature brilliance hitherto unsurpassed. The characters explore and discover the truth about

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.12.

2. The Confidential Clerk, 1955. See Chap.III, p.271ff11.

themselves simultaneously at the surface level of the play and at a deeper level of understanding. There is a perfect organic interrelationship between spiritual and dramatic development. As in The Cocktail Party, insight is naturally elicited from event, and in turn translated back into terms of action, or, in this case, of human relationship. The poetry in the play, such as it is, is consequently entirely dramatic. It is in this poetry, however, that the play's greatest weakness lies. Ironically enough, the power gained to the dramatist is strength lost to the poet. Dramatic event and human characterisation is wholly arresting, but the poetry has dwindled to a fine, lucid prose in which the characters express themselves with a precise but emotionally unexciting clarity.

Of strong significance in Eliot's dramatic development is the greatly increased power of human understanding revealed in this play. Here the poet who mistakenly interfered in the objective presentation of Sweeney Agonistes and The Family Reunion is completely replaced by fully integrated, dimensional character which engages our interest and sympathies on the ordinary human level. The emotion evolved from dramatic situation is employed to intensify the vitality of this character

as well as to sharpen spiritual awareness. The hero of the play is not, however, completely successful. While ostensibly sharing Celia's humility the deference of his companions to Colby's spiritual superiority unfortunately thrusts upon him more than a suggestion of the priggishness which marred the presentation of Harry. His human appeal is far less than that of Sir Claude and Mrs Guzzard, and we rejoice less in his spiritual triumph than we sympathise with their human suffering, this especially since the transformation of his spiritual insight into Christian charity is not happily rendered in terms of his departure to Joshua Park. Nevertheless, Eliot's acknowledgement of the importance of the human element in drama, and his fine handling of its presentation, is a great step forward in his dramatic career. Could he now combine the full power of his poetic genius with his matured dramatic skill he might well produce a poetic play worthy of standing at least in close proximity to the greatest.

Throughout Eliot's work, both poetic and dramatic, certain ideas and images are recurrent. We are therefore in a position to differentiate between the dramatic poem and the poetic drama, and between the dramatic and the poetic conception, by examining the modifications made by the distinct forms in the presentation of these ideas and

in the habits of the imagery. We may take, for example, the insistent theme of

The point of intersection of the timeless
With time,¹

the "still point of the turning world"² in which the essence of spiritual reality is concentrated in "a white light still and moving".³ In Four quartets, of which this idea is the underlying theme, the conception is fully and directly declaimed, and illustrated by a leisurely unfolding imagery. In The Rock the idea receives dramatic treatment. It is formulated in terms of an objective presentation, embodied in the "vision"⁴ of the ceaseless repetitive pattern of history, and thus substantiated by "a world which the author's mind has subjected to a process of simplification."⁵ The verbal imagery through which the idea is expressed by the Chorus is modified accordingly. It has direct bearing upon the

1. T.S. Eliot, Four quartets, 1944, 'The Dry SALVAGES'.

2. op.cit., 'Burnt Norton'.

3. op.cit.

4. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.445.

5. op.cit., p.446.

witnessed event, and is impregnated with the dominant theme of the external presentation - man's ceaseless building and rebuilding of a place in which he may worship. The eternal moment of human reality is caught in the specifically dramatic image of man's aspiration towards the divine -

But first you shall be reminded of other dedications
Out of the distant past of London, out of times less
dim:

So that you may remember
That the Temple is forever building, forever to be
destroyed, forever to be restored,
So that you may remember, seeing the past,
The dim waste plains of the future, where the Temple is
still to be built,
So that you may remember
The lives that await their time to be born, to be
dedicated
On the dim vast plain of the future, burning as lonely
lights.¹

The underlying idea recurs in The Family Reunion.

It is at "the intersection of the timeless moment"²
that Harry, in a vision of reality, realises himself as
one who is to atone for human sin. Here, in one of the
most genuine dramatic images of the play, the conception
is once again subordinated to its dramatic context and
bound by the circumference of the particular situation.

1. The Rock, Pt.II.

2. FOUR QUARTETS, 'LITTLE GIDDING'.

I mean that at Wishwood he will find another Harry.
 The man who returns will have to meet
 The boy who left. Round by the stables,
 In the coach-house, in the orchard,
 In the plantation, down the corridor
 That led to the nursery, round the corner
 Of the new wing, he will have to face him -
 And it will not be a very jolly corner.
 When the loop in time comes - and it does not come
 for everybody -
 The hidden is revealed, and the spectres show
 themselves.¹

Imagery here is drawn from an external dramatic event. Furthermore, it anticipates the atmosphere of terror in which the spiritual struggle is enacted, and gives dramatic comment on the level of spiritual understanding reached by the speaker. In order to appreciate the full significance of this last function we may compare this image, impregnated as it is with the fear of an imminent and unknown horror, with Harry's cry of triumph at the completion of his agony - "I must follow the bright angels".² The change in the tone of the imagery from a shrinking terror of "spectres" to a voluntary acceptance of divine messengers dramatizes the spiritual development throughout the event of the play.

1. The Family Reunion, Pt.I, Sc.I.

2. The Family Reunion, Pt.II, Sc.II.

In the Choruses to Murder in the Cathedral and The Family Reunion Eliot presents the idea of unexpected spiritual stirring accompanied by unnatural terrors and nightmare conceptions. A closer examination of this idea and of its presentation, and of the relationship between the idea and the context of the whole drama enables us to deduce some of the distinctive marks of the genuine dramatic concept. In The Family Reunion the theme of fearful spiritual awakening is wholly sterile and idiosyncratic. Awareness is not spontaneously evolved from dramatic interaction between character and plot. It is unnaturally inherent in a Chorus artificially constituted by means of "another trick"¹ on the part of the poet calculated to shock the audience from its complacency. Character is wrenched suddenly, and to its own bewilderment, from one level of understanding to another. There is no natural dramatic synthesis between these levels. The whole point of the "trick" is the violent contrast between a habitual state of total blindness and an abnormal prophetic trance. In order that the poet may point this contrast the characters which form the Chorus have no true dramatic life. They are completely subordinated to the control of the poet,

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama,' p.80.

and either provide paste-board types of middle class inanity or pathetically ludicrous puppets in the grip of a power which they cannot realise. In short, modification of character is here not dramatic, but poetic. This has further consequences in the nature of the imagery employed. Imagery here is repetitive and static. It is not dramatic in that it does not dramatize the eddies of emotion and the growth of self awareness which are proper to the genuine poetic play. If we compare the imagery used by the Chorus in the early stages of the play:

"Why should we stand here like guilty conspirators,
waiting for some revelation
When the hidden shall be exposed, and the newsboy
shall shout in the street?"¹

with that of the closing speech:

"What ambush lies beyond the heather
And behind the standing stones?
Beyond the Heaviside Layer
And behind the smiling moon?"²

we find only similar variations in the expression of the

1. The Family Reunion, Pt.I, Sc.I.

2. op.cit., Pt.II, Sc.III.

same theme. Since the theme expressed is not a spontaneous and healthy dramatic growth, the imagery involved is not dramatically modified, and consequently forms a series of monotonously repetitive illustrations.

On the other hand, in Murder in the Cathedral, the same basic idea of a bewildering and frightening spiritual resurgence has been transmuted to a truly dramatic conception.¹ There the idea springs involuntarily from and is naturally modified by dramatic event. The Chorus's fear of spiritual disturbance is concurrent with their fear that Thomas's return to England will result in disaster. They are not, as was the Chorus to The Family Reunion, suddenly assailed by idiosyncratic fits of terror and self-consciousness which have no organic relationship to their immediate context. The awareness unnaturally imposed upon Harry's relations is here only one phase in a spiritual development drawn spontaneously from the dramatic situation.

Imagery in this play is genuinely dramatic, reflecting as it does the swift movement of emotion which in turn reflects the dramatic action. Each stage in the spiritual progress of the play is dramatised by the changing tone of a living imagery rooted in immediate

1. See Chap. III, p. 212 ff.

circumstance. The play opens in a deliberate apathy,

The labourer bends to his piece of earth,
 earth-colour, his¹ own colour,
 Preferring to pass unobserved.

fearfully guarded by those who "do not wish anything to happen" against the insistent tremors of a terror which develops simultaneously with the main action of the play. After the scene in which the Tempters appear to Thomas the imagery becomes gradually impregnated with a sense of horror,

The forms take shape in the dark air:
 Puss-purr of leopard, footfall of padding bear.²

a horror suspended for a moment in the terrible calm of utter despair - "not a stir, not a shoot, not a breath"³ - before the climax of screaming agony in which the familiar and secure crashes down before a nightmare of fear,

Rings of light coiling downwards, descending
 To the horror of the ape.⁴

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1. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.I.
 2. op.cit.
 3. op.cit., Pt.II.
 4. op.cit.

The imagery of terror which gives expression to the frightened spirit, awakening but as yet not understanding, closely resembles imagery employed for the same purpose in The Family Reunion. The Chorus to Murder in the Cathedral recalls the moment before complete spiritual resurgence, and once again we stand petrified in a darkened house, shuddering at the "footfall in the passage,"¹ the "shadow in the doorway,"² behaving

As if the door might suddenly
open, the curtains be drawn,
The cellar make some dreadful disclosure, the
roof disappear.³

The distortion of the familiar again appears in terms of some ghastly monstrosity hovering overhead - "the wings of the future darken the past,"⁴ "scaly wings slanting over, huge and ridiculous,"⁵ and

the beak
and claws have desecrated
History."⁶

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1. op.cit.
 2. op.cit.
 3. The Family Reunion, Pt.I, Sc.I.
 4. op.cit., Pt.I, Sc.III.
 5. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.II.
 6. The Family Reunion, Pt.I, Sc.III

Here, however, the moment of terror is not static, the imagery does not repeat itself at every turn in a maze of spiritual blindness. The horror which evolved spontaneously from dramatic event is as spontaneously further modified by the progress of the play. Fear is resolved into a hopeless resignation to "the white flat face of Death,"¹ to "emptiness, absence, separation from God,"² but beyond this is the triumph of self abnegation, the glorious instant self realisation and beyond this still the magnificent hymn of praise in which humanity, having voluntarily confronted its own sinful and cowardly truth, freely calls upon the mercy of its God. In the final Chorus to the play images of terror are transformed by spiritual realisation to expressions of rejoicing. Winter which brought "death from the sea",⁴ "ruinous spring"⁵ and "disastrous summer"⁶ are subjugated by a new-found faith to

the voices of the seasons, the snuffle of winter, the song of spring, the drone of summer.⁷

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1. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.II
 2. op.cit.
 3. op.cit.
 4. op.cit., Pt.I.
 5. op.cit.
 6. op.cit.
 7. op.cit., Pt.II.
-

joining in the general paeon of praise. The "rings of light coiling downwards"¹ in horror have become "the glory of light"² which is in God. Fear which was

woven like a pattern of living worms
In the guts of the women of Canterbury"³

is driven out by hope born of spiritual understanding, and all living creatures, even "the worm in the soil, and the worm in the belly"⁴ acknowledge and glorify their maker.

In Murder in the Cathedral the relationship of the verbal imagery to its context confirms the truth that, in true poetic drama, every element of form is an aspect of concept, and all are mutually creative in the organic growth of the whole. Here the poet dramatist is to be found working simultaneously on the two levels of "human action and of words"⁵ and "this not by a concurrence of two activities, but by the full expansion

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit.

5. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama,' p.85.

of one and the same activity."¹ to achieve the "double pattern in great poetic drama."² We may illustrate from the imagery to this play this essentially organic relationship between the two levels of dramatic expression. For example, the opening Chorus to the second part draws together surface and depths of the drama

What sign of the spring of the year?
Only the death of the old: not a stir, not a shoot,
not a breath.
Do the days begin to lengthen?
Longer and darker the day, shorter and colder the
night.
Still and stifling the air: but a wind is stored up
in the East.
The starved crow sits in the field, attentive; and
in the wood
The owl rehearses the hollow note of death."³

Here we have not only a setting in the description of the barren countryside, but also the dramatisation of a spiritual condition. The safe and familiar world of spiritual apathy in which the women of Canterbury took refuge has been shattered, and, as yet, nothing has been offered in its place. Nothing is left but despair, sterility and death. Earlier in the play the underlying

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1. 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', Selected Essays, p.52
 2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.73.
 3. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.II.

theme of spiritual experience is dramatised in terms of imagery involving human action. Deliberate indifference is symbolised by the monotonous security of the commonplace **d**aily round

And meanwhile we have gone on living,
 Living and partly living,
 Picking together the pieces,
 Gathering faggots at nightfall,
 Building a partial shelter,
 For sleeping, and eating and drinking and laughter.¹

Once again imagery is working on two levels, simultaneously developing spiritual significance and characterising the Chorus's human existence as poor women involved in ordinary, everyday event. The human existence of the Chorus is in turn reflected back in the imagery through which they express themselves. They speak naturally in terms of the passing seasons, of landscape and animal life, of the **un**varying labours and activities which mark the passage of their uneventful lives. Even the wild and frightful imagery which dramatises the climax of their bewilderment and fear has roots in their close association with natural law.

1. op.cit. Pt.I.

I

have smelt
 Death in the rose, death in the hollyhock, sweet pea,
 hyacinth, primrose and cowslip. I have seen
 Trunk and horn, tusk and hoof, in odd places,¹

is a ghastly distortion, but it is a distortion of something with which they are ordinarily familiar. The development of this imagery is a natural and dramatic development, and may well provide a criticism of the deliberately shocking and somewhat precious contrasts in The Family Reunion.

A dominant idea which recurs throughout Eliot's work is that of a world superficially alive with a flashy surface motion, and yet spiritually moribund -

Distracted from distraction by distraction
 Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
 Timid apathy with no concentration
 Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
 That blows before and after time,
 Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
 Time before and time after.
 Eructation of unhealthy souls
 Into the faded air, the torpid
 Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of
 London,
 Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney,
 Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate. Not here
 Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.²

Here, in Four Quartets, the underlying conception of

1. op.cit., Pt.II.

2. Four Quartets, 'Burnt Norton'.

the idea is poetic; this is a full statement of the case for all time. The idea occurs again in The Cocktail Party, but this time it is dramatically conceived. In the play it is subordinated to the immediate situation and to the character of the person by whom it is expressed. The intense complex imagery is modified to the phrases and rhythms of everyday speech, and we receive an impression of character searching for inadequate means of expression which fills the idea with that sense of unique significance essential to the drama.

I have no delusions -
 Except that the world I live in seems all a delusion!

 But first I must tell
 you
 That I should really like to think there's something
 wrong with me -
 Because, if there isn't, then there's something wrong,
 Or at least, very different from what it seemed to be,
 With the world itself - and that's much more frightening!¹

Here truth is not declaimed but gradually and spontaneously acquired by the nexus of Celia's character with the plot. Her sense of futility is at first applied ~~not~~ only to Edward and to the relationship which they have shared.

1. The Cocktail Party, Act.II.

I listened to your voice, that had always thrilled me,
 And it became another voice - no, not a voice:
 What I heard was only the noise of an insect,
 Dry, endless, meaningless, inhuman -
 You might have made it by scraping your legs together -
 Or however grasshoppers do it.¹

This imagery is truly dramatic. Impregnated as it is with pity and contempt it is completely subordinated to the passion of the immediate situation. Later in her spiritual development Celia applies the idea generally to the society by which she is surrounded—

They make noises, and they think they are talking
 to each other;
 They make faces, and think they understand each other.²

This is the "twittering world"³ of Four Quartets, but the expression of the conception is particular to this character at this time. The poet's direct statement has been replaced by a specific individual's tentative inquiry into the nature of reality.

In The Confidential Clerk the basic idea is again modified by the particular character and situation. Sir Claude Mulhammer is not capable of Celia's degree of spiritual understanding. The self imposed financier is a little ashamed of his artistic aspirations towards

1. op.cit., Act.I, Sc.I.
2. op.cit., Act.II.
3. Four Quartets, 'Burnt Norton'.

A world where the form is the reality
Of which the substantial is only a shadow.¹

This conception of the actual as opposed to the real is translated into the purely personal terms of commercial success and an underlying preference for the aesthetic satisfaction of ceramics. This view of the occupation which symbolises superficial living has been adjusted to his spiritual capacity,

It begins as a kind of make-believe
And the make-believing makes it real.

The unsuccessful artist who has forced himself to become a business man cannot dedicate himself wholly to the promotion of those spiritual values which inwardly he desires, and consequently he does not enter fully into either of his "two worlds"² which are for him "each a kind of make-believe."³ Here we are not involved in illustrating as deeply as we are in drama, and the basic idea has been modified to meet the requirements of emotional accuracy.

1. The Confidential Clerk, Act I.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

Emotional as opposed to purely intellectual reality is essential to genuine drama. The true poetic dramatist must satisfy the theatre's demand for an immediate and compelling human situation as well as the demands of art for cosmic significance and universal truth. This significance and truth must be built into the drama and evolve naturally from it. It may well be argued that Eliot has not yet achieved a consistently great poetic play, "a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order"¹ in the substantiation of the underlying conception. Nevertheless we are able to trace in his work a progression from the truth absolute of poetry to the truth absolute and particular of the drama. Judged not only as a pioneer in this century but also against the general background of literature and of the theatre, his claim towards the title of poetic dramatist must meet with approbation.

1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.85.

CHAPTER III

The Drama of T.S. Eliot

The drama of T.S. Eliot is essentially experimental. His dramatic output is small, but within the compass of five complete plays and a fragment, written over a period of twenty years, there may be traced a rapid and significant development in dramatic technique. Moreover, this development is not merely the inevitable imaginative growth and practical improvement of the practising poet and craftsman; it is a conscious development, a deliberate striving for perfection of form. All art is indeed a search for perfection, and every artist works towards the creation of the perfect expression of his imaginative conception, but in Eliot's work the desire of the poet is continually fortified by the conscious will of the pioneer of verse drama in the contemporary English theatre. Eliot's is the greatest achievement in the English poetic drama of the 20th century, and yet the term "pioneer" is justified in association with his name. He himself is the first to admit "that the work of still another generation will

be needed - if for another generation the opportunities are still open - before poetry can hope to be established on our popular stage as it was three hundred and more years ago."¹ Eliot is unselfishly aware of the needs of his age, and his aspirations as an individual artist are spurred, controlled, and directed by his self-imposed obligation to the satisfaction of those needs - "I think, you see, of poetic drama as a social creation. What I hope we shall eventually get, is not one great dramatist, a solitary peak in a flat plain, but a cluster of dramatists - not necessarily around a Shakespeare, because a Shakespeare is too exceptional a phenomenon even to hope for, but exhibiting a pattern of diversity and unity. That would be a real dramatic renaissance. I regard our work today as that of the first generation only: my greatest hope is that we shall lay some foundations upon which others will come to build."² The time for Shakespeare's achievement was ripe. It fell to Eliot to impose some kind of order on what, despite the efforts of the Irish and of the English

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam) p.10.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', The New York Herald Tribune, Vol.CIX, No.37, 681, Section V, p.2, col.2.

poetic dramatists of the first decades of the twentieth century,¹ was a virtual chaos. In 1919 Eliot wrote - "Poetry on the stage is Dead, has been dead two hundred years."² In 1950 - "In an age of such diverse experimentation, nobody can afford to take over a kind of versification ready made. We can only hope that in the course of a generation or so, by a kind of unconscious selection and rejection, a common medium will be hammered out, within which there will be plenty of scope for the expression of widely different poetic personalities."³ Within those thirty years a significant development had taken place. The way through the wood was by no means clearly beaten out, but poetic drama was gaining new hope and new strength, and its resurgence owes much to Eliot's critical theory and more to his artistic practice. The greatness of the dramatist lies not in his mastery of a traditional form, but in his achievement in the search for a form in which the conception of twentieth century poetic

1. See Chap. I.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Duchess of Malfi at the Lyric', Art and Letters, III, 1, Winter 1919/20.

3. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (N.Y.H.T.), p.2, col.2.

dramatists may be expressed. Coming as he did upon "a formless age",¹ Eliot is a dramatic explorer, claiming ground on which the poetic drama of the future may build.

We have witnessed that the poetic dramatists of the nineteenth century were criminally responsible for the decease of verse drama on the stage,² and that, despite the fresh impetus given by the Irish Dramatic movement and maintained by the English poetic dramatists of the early twentieth century,³ no general and traditional form for twentieth century poetic drama was evolved. The Irish Dramatic Movement had helped the English speaking drama to learn again "the habit of high poetry",⁴ but, though Eliot would certainly have been the man to see the possibilities, there was to his hand not even "a form which in itself is neither good nor bad but which permits an artist to fashion it into a work of art."⁵ In 1920 Eliot said, "it is perhaps the

1. T.S. Eliot, 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.443.

2. See Chap.I, pp. 2-3.

3. See Chap.I, p.32 fl1.

4. U.M. Ellis-Farmer, The Irish Dramatic Movement, p.1.

5. 'A Review of 'Cinnamon and Angelica' by Middleton Murray', The Athenaeum, May 14th, 1920.

craving for some such *donnée* which draws us on toward the present mirage of poetic drama",¹ and six years later he made his first contribution towards this need.

In the same year in which the first fragment of Sweeney Agonistes² appeared in The Criterion, Eliot, in his introduction to Charlotte Eliot's Savonarola, took a forthright stand for a new dramatic form capable of meeting contemporary needs - "We cannot reinstate either blank verse or the heroic couplet. The next form of drama will have to be a verse drama but in new verse forms ... probably a new form will be devised out of colloquial speech."³ As early as 1920, the dramatist who, thirty years later, was to meet the commercial theatre on its own terms, was exhorting the poetic drama to a new boldness - "Possibly the majority of attempts to confect a poetic drama have begun at the wrong end; they have aimed at a small public which wants 'poetry' ... our problem should be to take a

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1. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.443.
 2. T.S. Eliot, Sweeney Agonistes. 'Fragment of a Prologue' first published in The New Criterion, Vol.IV, No.IV, October, 1926, and 'Fragment of an Agon' in The New Criterion, Vol.V, No.1, January, 1927.
 3. T.S. Eliot, Intro. to Savonarola, by Charlotte Eliot, 1926, p.X.

form of entertainment, and subject it to the process which would leave it a form of art. Perhaps the music hall comedian is the best material."¹

Such is the irony of circumstance, and especially of circumstance controlled by the taste of the English theatre-going public, that Sweeney Agonistes² was first performed in the very atmosphere which Eliot realised to be unhelpful, and possibly even maleficent, in the struggle to revitalise verse drama in the theatre. The scene indicated by Desmond MacCarthy's report of a preview of the play given by the Group Theatre at No.9, Great Newport Street³ suggests the martyred aestheticism of the Bohemian and the intellectually select. On Oct. 1st 1935, The Group Theatre opened its season at the Westminster with a double bill, in which Sweeney Agonistes⁴ served as a curtain-raiser to Auden's macabre revue The Dance of Death.⁵ The bill ran for only a fortnight, and there is little doubt that the type of playgoer which

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1. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.447.
 2. First produced with W.H.Auden's The Dance of Death at the Westminster Theatre on October 1st, 1935.
 3. The Listener, Vol.XIII. No.313, Jan 9, 1935, p.80.
 4. Sweeney Agonistes, 1932.
 5. W.H. Auden, The Dance of Death, 1933.

it attracted was in fact a member of that "small public which likes poetry".¹ The walls of the commercial theatre were not stormed by Eliot's small initial skirmish, but in Sweeney Agonistes he was experimenting with tactics which were to prove shattering to the thoughtless complacency of the popular audience in his historic invasion at the New Theatre fifteen years later.²

Sweeney Agonistes is a violent and shocking artistic expression of a terrible imaginative conception. It is a bold step in the movement away from the distant poetic Utopias of the nineteenth century dramatists and towards a drama which is in close touch with contemporary life. The problem of imposing a formal unity in "a formless age"³ is attempted by the adaptation of "a form of entertainment"⁴ with which a modern audience would be familiar and at ease. The death of the soul in man is expressed in terms of revue and music hall entertainment. The uncompromising horror

1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.74.

2. The Cocktail Party. First produced ^{in the West End} at the New Theatre, May 3rd, 1950.

3. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.443.

4. op.cit., p.447.

of the effect of these dramatic fragments is achieved by the contrast between the poet's fearful conception of modern living and the reassuring inanities by which the surface of this modern life is presented. The use of the familiar conventions of the music hall - rhyme, recitative, male quartette and patterned phrase repetition - provides a formal structure sufficiently familiar to bear the burden of colloquial speech without loss of artistic unity. Everyday conversation is stylised to meet the demands of the popular form, and the result is a perfect fusion, a new imaginative conception, a subjection of popular entertainment and everyday conversation "to a process which would leave it a form of art".¹

The play which evolves from the interaction of these elements emphasises the facile and suffocating monotony of its conventional constituents; it is a nightmare world, a distortion of the safe and the familiar. The unthinking conventionalities of everyday conversation, and the inane pleasantness of popular entertainment have united to form a world spiritually dead. Familiar speech rhythms and intonations are stylised to a fearful jingling senselessness, and yet

1. op.cit.

the prototype of the mechanical exchanges of Doris and Dusty could be heard today in a thousand store restaurants -

Doris: I like Sam

Dusty: I like Sam
Yes and Sam's a nice boy too.
He's a funny fellow.

Doris: He is a funny fellow
He's like a fellow once I knew.
He could make you laugh.

Dusty: Sam can make you laugh.
Sam's all right.¹

and the flat monotony of the American business mens' trite courtesies returns an echo from a thousand public bars -

Klipstein: I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance.

Arumpacker: Extremely pleased to become acquainted.

Klipstein: Sam - I should say Loot Sam Wauchope

Arumpacker: Of the Canadian Expeditionary Force -

Klipstein: The Loot has told us a lot about you.

Krumpacker: We were all in the war together²
Klip and me and the Cap and Sam.

The surface level of Sweeney Agonistes is a tinkling

1. Sweeney Agonistes, 'Fragment of a Frologue'.

2. op.cit.

banality in which the automatic rhythms of the telephone bell and the knocking on the door are as real as the vapid platitudes of Sweeney's acquaintances. The dramatic theme of the fragments, which depends upon the interrelationship of different levels of consciousness, forms the core of Eliot's later dramatic work, and is especially dominant in The Family Reunion.¹ Sweeney, in the earlier play, has already heard

The admonitions
From the world around the corner.²

It is significant that Oreste's words on the appearance of the Furies are quoted on the title page of Sweeney Agonistes. The hero's experiences are identical with those of Lord Monchensey's. Harry's mind is subtle and sensitive; Sweeney's vulgar and coarse, but a sudden awareness of guilt expressed through Harry's self accusation and Sweeney's realisation that -

Any man might do a girl in
Any man has to, needs to, wants to
Once in a lifetime, do a girl in,³

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1. The Family Reunion, 1939.
 2. The Family Reunion, Part I, Scene I.
 3. Sweeney Agonistes, 'Fragment of an Agon'.

brings an unexpected and terrifying revelation of the real behind the actual. Familiar values are reversed, "the unreal and the unimportant"¹ which we call "the normal"² is swept away, and the ordinary and the thoughtless wake in the middle of the night in a fit of "the hoo-ha's",³ no longer - "assured of certain certainties",⁴ believing for a terrible instant that "death is life and life is death",⁵ and ceasing "to be sure of what is real or unreal".⁶ In Sweeney Agonistes the horror of the situation is concentrated by Sweeney's own inability to grasp the full significance of his revelation. The realisation of the need for spiritual rebirth comes upon him in the midst of a fatuous description of his Utopian - "crocodile isle",⁷ a sudden drunken insight into the monotonous blind terror of

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1. The Family Reunion, Part II, Scene I.
 2. op.cit.
 3. Sweeney Agonistes, 'Fragment of an Agon'.
 4. Preludes IV, COLLECTED POEMS, 1909-1935
 5. Sweeney Agonistes, Fragment of an Agon.
 6. The Family Reunion, Pt.I, Scene I.
 7. Sweeney Agonistes, Fragment of an Agon.

"birth,^{and} copulation and death".¹ More terrible is the hopeless attempt to drag the cover of sordid normality over this frightening glimpse of spiritual reality. For Thomas, Harry, Celia, and even for Colby, there is a path which leads through escapism to redemption; for Sweeney, only hopelessness, a sense of wrong without the power to put it right, a frustrated attempt at communication -

Well here again that don't apply
But I gotta use words when I talk to you",²

and despair of solution even if communication were established,

Sweeney: I gotta use words when I talk to you
But if you understand or if you don't
That's nothing to me and nothing to you
We all gotta do what we gotta do
We're gona sit here and drink this booze
We're gona sit here and have a tune
We're gona stay and we're gona go
And somebody's gotta pay the rent

Doris: I know who

Sweeney: But that's nothing to me and nothing to you.³

The unflinching originality of Sweeney Agonistes

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

is characteristic of Eliot's essentially explorative achievements. Furthermore, even in these fragments, we are able to trace certain habits of thought and technique which are later to become essentials of Eliot's dramatic method. The theme of the play, the mental conflict of a mind surrounded by the suffocatingly ordinary, and yet straining towards an implicit reality which it finds in the explicitly actual, recurs throughout Eliot's dramatic work. The use of the chorus, especially as a symbol of everyday humanity, is embryonic in the fragments, as are the technical devices of ritual, of strongly rhythmical but flexible verse, of nightmare imagery to express the ordinary man's fear of the unknown, and of violent contrast between the manifestations of the various levels of spiritual understanding as illustrated by the problem of communication among the characters. This last measure is overworked in Sweeney Agonistes. The fragments have, as Helen Gardner points out, an "essentially static theme",¹ and "what drama is apparent in them is simply the drama of contrast or interruption ... It is difficult to see how such a subject could be developed at all except

1. Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot, 1949, p.150.

by repetition."¹ Nevertheless though Sweeney Agonistes as an absolute growth may be said to be sterile, its sterility is not that of lifeless imitation; the form chosen by Eliot for his first dramatic effort was not capable of carrying a complete drama, but it provides a point of departure for the greater achievements which followed. As Miss Gardner suggests, "the impulse behind the fragments was less the impulse to write a play, than the wish to experiment in the writing of dramatic verse".²

In a letter written in reply to a damning review by Verschöyle in The Spectator³ T.S. Eliot said of The Rock⁴ - "The play makes no pretence of being a 'contribution to English dramatic literature': it is a revue. My only seriously dramatic aim was to show that there is a possible rôle for the Chorus.... And to consider The Rock as an 'official apologia' for church-building is to lay a weight upon it which this rock was never intended to bear. It is not an apologia for the campaign, but an advertisement."⁵ The Rock is not a

1. op.cit., p.131.

2. op.cit., p.132.

3. Derek Verschöyle on The Rock. The Spectator, No.5,527, June 1, 1934, p.851.

4. The Rock, Performed Sadler's Wells Theatre, 28 May - 9 June, 1934.

5. T.S.Eliot, Letter to the Editor of The Spectator, No.5,528, June 8, 1934, p.887.

wholly spontaneous outcome of Eliot's dramatic development. E. Martin Browne commissioned Eliot to write the "pageant play ... on behalf of the forty-five churches fund of the diocese of London".¹ As Miss Bradbrook points out - "The Rock is frankly propaganda, and has the merits and limits of propaganda."²

In form The Rock is a kaleidoscopic series of tableaux, linked dramatically by the magnificent liturgical contemporaneity of the Choruses, and on the latter the dramatic unity of the 'play' entirely depends. F.O. Matthiessen, who describes The Rock as a "set-piece",³ gives a fair estimate of the non-choral section of this ecclesiastical revue - "Strictly speaking, The Rock is a pageant, not a drama. That is to say, its situation does not give rise to any intense struggle or conflict; its structure consists of a series of scenes of a related tone ... Many of the scenes are hardly of interest beyond their original purpose of furnishing the text for a formal spectacle, which was accompanied by music and ballet. And some of them, by their very conception, do not escape from unctuousness."⁴ We are

1. Title page note to The Rock, 1934.

2. M.C. Bradbrook, T.S. Eliot, 1950, p.38.

3. F.O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot, 1947, p.162.

4. op.cit., p.161.

unfortunately unable to assess exactly how far the Rev. Vincent Howson must be made responsible for the dialogue between "Bert" and his mates: Eliot credits him with "the title of joint author" in his Prefatory Note to the play, and certainly one would not willingly charge Eliot with the whole weight of the burden of this fulsome appeal to the low level of intelligence of what Professor Isaacs describes as "an audience of church workers, of mothers' outings, of shepherds and their flocks".¹ The scenes involving the modern workmen are made embarrassing by a crude and laboured humour and a cloying sentimentality. For instance, the conversation between Bert and his wife, involving irritating self-consciousness -

Mrs Ethelbert: I'm beginnin' to rumble now, Bert, what comes o' all that readin' you do at night.²

and jarringly sentimental self-deprecation -

Ethelbert: 'Arf a mo'. Gents all and lady, if I may be allowed to say, I maintain as this 'ere is too solemn a occasion for drinkin' the 'ealth of a mortal and perishable individual like your 'umble if you take my meanin'.³

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1. J. Isaacs, An Assessment of Twentieth-Century Literature, 1951, pp.152-3.
 2. The Rock, Pt.II.
 3. op.cit.

is typical of a scenario from a Kathleen Harrison - Jack Warner film. Furthermore, the historical scenes, though pleasing and no doubt spectacular, are written on the modest intellectual plain of the Childrens' Hour serial play. Mingled as they are with the fine dramatic poetry of the Choruses, these scenes suggest either that Eliot was overruled by occasional requirements, or that in an attempt to compromise with his audience, he was guilty of what is very nearly gross patronization. The tableaux in The Rock might well be accused of being "a very pretty piece of pageantry, at the expense of the essential emotion of religious drama or of any drama",¹ and the composer of Four Quartets² can take little pleasure in looking back on such crude popularisations as -

Ethelbert: "There's some notion about time,
 what says that the past - what's be'ind
 you - is what's goin' to 'appen in the
 future, bein' as the future 'as already
 'appened."

especially in the light of his own condemnation of

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Religious Drama: Medieval and Modern', The University of Edinburgh Journal, Vol.IX, No.1, Autumn 1937, pp.8-9.
 2. T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, 1944.
 3. The Rock, Pt.I.

Shaw and Maeterlinck - "the moment an idea has been transferred from its pure state in order that it may become comprehensible to the inferior intelligence it has lost contact with art".¹ However, we can scarcely criticise Eliot as a dramatist with a fine disregard of the propagandist cause which he adopted, and whether, in adopting this cause, he perjured his artistic soul, is not a matter for present consideration. The forty-five churches fund turned Eliot's attention to the possibilities of religious drama, and since the far greater achievement of Murder in the Cathedral² is indirectly in its debt, we can but regard it with gratitude. For The Rock itself, it is well to recall to mind Eliot's own statement. "My only seriously dramatic aim was to show that there was a possible rôle for the Chorus",³ for it is in these Choruses that at once the poetry and the drama of the pageant lies.

Eliot, like Abercrombie, recognises form as an aspect of concept.⁴ In true poetic drama the creation

1. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.446.
2. Murder in the Cathedral, 1935.
3. See supra, p.172.
4. A main tenet of Abercrombie which recurs throughout his work, but a convenient reference is 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', 1912, English Critical Essays, twentieth century, selected by F.M. Jones, 1933, pp.255-7.

of poetry and of drama is a simultaneous action, a perfect fusion. I shall discuss this theory in relationship to Eliot, and to other modern critical writings at a later date;¹ for the moment, suffice it to present the case of Eliot's belief in his own terms - "The writer of poetic drama is not merely a man skilled in two arts and skilful to weave them together; he is not a writer who can decorate a play with poetic language and metre. His task is different from that of the 'dramatist' or that of the 'poet' for his pattern is more complex and more dimensional. --- The genuine poetic drama must, at its best, observe all the regulations of the plain drama, but will weave them organically --- into a much richer design."² For a true appreciation of the poet dramatist's creation the "whole design"³ must be grasped, and plot and character read "in the understanding of their subterrene and submarine music",⁴ for "a true verse play is not a play translated into verse, it is conceived and carried out in terms of verse.

1. See Chap.IV.

2. T.S. Eliot, Preface to The Wheel of Fire by Wilson Knight, 1930, pp.XVII-XVIII.

3. op.cit., p.XVIII.

4. op.cit.

To work out a play in verse is to be working like a musician as well as like a prose dramatist; it is to see the thing as a whole musical pattern. And this is an entirely different thing from a play set to music. It is not like opera, but some musical form like the sonata or fuge. The verse dramatist must operate on you on two levels at once, dramatically, with the character and plot",¹ (for Eliot would not underestimate the importance of keeping the attention of his audience at the surface level), "but underneath the action, which should be perfectly intelligible, there should be a musical pattern which intensifies our excitement by reinforcing it with feelings from a deeper and less articulate level."² At the end of this discourse on poetic drama, Eliot says of the Chorus, "It has the great advantage of being conveyed more fully in verse than in prose, and of supporting something of which I spoke at the beginning, the musical pattern, as well as the dramatic pattern of the play."³

The organic integration between the Choruses

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'The Need for Poetic Drama', The Listener, Nov.25th, 1936, p.994.
 2. op.cit.
 3. op.cit., p.995.

to The Rock and the rest of the play is not so finely handled as in the greater Murder in the Cathedral. The inevitably loose construction of the pageant form, and the mingling of poetry and prose to which Eliot himself objects,¹ added to the fact that their status as a symbol of the Church of God necessarily sets them above the human drama, results in a certain distancing of the Chorus. They are seen rather in their position as spectators, as remote commentators, than as participant sufferers in the dramatic search for salvation. The poetic significance of the presentation, the "musical pattern which intensifies our excitement by reinforcing it with feelings from a deeper and less articulate level"² is not "subterrene and submarine music".³ The light in which plot and character of the human pageant must be read brightens and fades concurrently with the stage lights etching and dimming the statuesque figures of the Chorus in presentation. The "musical pattern"⁴ is not woven organically into

1. See T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', pp.69 and 74.

2. 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.994.

3. Preface to The Wheel of Fire, p.XVIII.

4. 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.994.

"the whole design".¹ It appears in the form of choral interludes illustrating and interpreting the surface level of the drama. There is clearly a divorce between the surface level and the choral section, and the cosmic significance of the drama runs parallel to rather than underlies it. One feels aware of two separate unities in the play, the conscious unity of the external story from the laying of the foundations to the consecration of the church, and the more subtle inward unity of the constant rebirth of faith and hope in mankind. Here again there is evidence of a deliberate simplicity demanded by the occasion of writing. The unity of The Rock is superimposed rather than organic, but, though the essence of the poet dramatist's conception is distilled in the Choruses rather than diffused through the whole work, we cannot deny the grandeur of this conception or of its expression through the Chorus.

Furthermore, the fact that Eliot, in this play, attempts to meet the dramatist's obligation to drama on the surface level of human event is in itself significant. Although the relationship between the surface and the

1. Preface to The Wheel of Fire, p.XVIII.

depths of The Rock lacks the subtlety of genuine dramatic interplay, the effort to achieve an imaginative synthesis between event and spiritual significance is a confirmation of Eliot's development as a poetic dramatist,¹ and a promise of future achievement. The Rock provides a transition between the static drama of contrast in Sweeney Agonistes and the genuine, organic interaction between poetry and drama in Murder in the Cathedral and The Cocktail Party. The structure of The Rock is simple with the simplicity of the immature, but here, in contrast to Sweeney Agonistes, Eliot draws cosmic significance from actual event. Poetry is beginning to evolve spontaneously from dramatic action. The Chorus to The Rock, though divorced from dramatic event at the structural level, is at one with it at the depths of imaginative conception, and consequently its utterance is poetry genuinely dramatic.

In the Choruses to The Rock is expressed the true theme of the pageant, the relationship of society to God. They are pervaded by a sense of the point of intersection of time and the eternal which is dominant throughout Eliot's poetic and dramatic work, and explicit

1. See Chap. II, pp. 129-131.

in Four quartets,¹ a sense which man achieves only through his relationship with moments in time -

Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in
time and out of time,
A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we
call history; transecting, bisecting the world
of time, a moment in time but not like a moment
of time,
A moment of time but time was made through that
moment: for without the meaning there is no
time, and that moment of time gave the
meaning.²

With the exception of one moment of despair, from which
it is rallied by the Rock -

O faint-hearted, and easily unsettled, and easily lost
In the blinding movement of time, sinking and
borne away,³

the Chorus is placed above "this twittering world"⁴ a
commentator on and interpreter of the human drama -

The aspect of time
Caught in the form of limitation
Between un-being and being.⁵

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1. Four Quartets, 1944.
 2. The Rock, Pt.II.
 3. op.cit.
 4. Four Quartets, 'Burnt Norton'.
 5. op.cit.

The Chorus stands "at the still point of the turning world",¹ and the true significance of the play, the essence of the drama, is concentrated in its observations on the living scene. The "dramatic pattern"² of the pageant is rendered by the Chorus in terms of "the musical pattern"³ which underlies genuine poetic drama. The Times, in a review of the production of The Rock, at Sadler's Wells, said of the Chorus - "They help to prove Mr Eliot's contention that poetry in itself is dramatic".⁴ The Choruses to The Rock are not merely magnificent poetic excrescences. They form the nucleus of the dramatic conception expressed "in terms of verse".⁵ The musical and dramatic patterns interact with increasing intensity. Writing on The Duchess of Malfi at the Lyric in 1919, Eliot said "I am inclined to believe that any poetic intensity in a play will be dramatic intensity as well".⁶ The significance of the dramatic action which

1. op.cit.

2. 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.994.

3. op.cit.

4. The Times, No.46766, May 29, 1934, p.12, col.2.

5. 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.994.

6. 'The Duchess of Malfi at the Lyric', Art and Letters, III, 1, Winter 1919/20.

reveals through a presentation of historical time the unending repetition of human situation and of human reaction is condensed in the poetic utterance of the Chorus, and the dramatic situation taughtens and intensifies with the intensification of this utterance. The loose, cinematographic effect of the changing historical scenes, and the half formed, sentimentalised truths spoken by the modern workmen, are raised by the Chorus to an abstract point out of time where poetry and drama are one -

But first you shall be reminded of other dedications
 Out of the distant past of London, out of times less
 dim:
 So that you may remember, seeing the past,
 The dim waste plains of the future, where the
 Temple is still to be built,
 So that you may remember
 The lives that await their time to be born, to be
 dedicated
 On the dim vast plain of the future, burning as
 lonely lights.¹

In 1926 Eliot wrote - "Dramatic form may occur at various points along a line the termini of which are liturgy and realism; --- In genuine drama the form is determined by the point on the line at which a tension between liturgy and realism takes place,"²

1. The Rock, Pt.II.

2. Introduction to Savonarola by Charlotte Eliot, 1926, p.X.

and continued by praising the establishment of this tension in Marivaux, Congreve, Aeschylus and Everyman, and by saying that in the work of Ibsen and Chekov "we probably have drama at the extreme limit beyond which it ceases to have artistic form".¹ Here he recalls his own words written three years previously. "We know now that the gesture of daily existence is inadequate for the stage; instead of pretending that the stage gesture is a copy of reality, let us adopt a literal untruth, a thorough-going convention, a ritual. For the stage - not only in its remote origins, but always - is a ritual, and the failure of the contemporary stage to satisfy the craving for ritual is one of the reasons why it is not a living art".² In Sweeney Agonistes Eliot had adopted the modern ritualistic convention of the revue and music-hall. In The Rock he turns to the oldest ritualistic source of the drama, the liturgy of the Church,

The direct influence of the formal introits of the Church is at its finest in the magnificent hymn to Light which forms the final Chorus to the play.³

1. The Rock, Pt. II. op.cit., p XI.

2. op.cit. 'DRAMATIS PERSONAE', THE CRITERION, I, 3, April, 1923,

pp. 303-6

3. op.cit., Pt. I. THE ROCK, Pt. II

Here Eliot has at last found a traditional form perfectly suited to his imaginative conception -

O Light Invisible we praise Thee!
 Too bright for mortal vision.
 O Greater Light, we praise Thee for the less;
 The eastern light our spires touch at morning,
 The light that slants upon our western doors at
 evening,
 The twilight over stagnant pools at halflight,
 moon light and star light, owl and moth light,
 Glow-worm glow-light on a grass blade.
 O Light Invisible, we worship Thee!¹

This is no mere repetition of time-worn phraseology.

The bone structure of the traditional religious anthem is revitalised with the breath of contemporary life, and traditional language and metre impose artistic restraint on present day spiritual rejoicing and anguish -

Thus your fathers were made
 Fellow citizens of the saints, of the household of God,
 being built upon the foundation
 Of apostles and prophets, Christ Jesu himself the
 chief cornerstone.
 But you, have you built well, that you now sit
 helpless in a ruined house?
 Where many are born to idleness, to frittered lives
 and squalid deaths, embittered scorn in
 homeless hives,
 And those who would build and restore turn out the
 palms of their hands, or look in vain towards
 foreign lands for alms to be more or the urn
 to be filled.²

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit., Pt.I.

The greatness of Eliot's achievement can be measured by the skill with which he adapts a liturgical form, to a flexibility which will expand without breaking, to contain contemporary needs. At times it must be granted that he descends to an Audenish precociousness -

I journeyed to the suburbs, and there I was told:
 We toil for six days, on the seventh we must motor
 to Hindhead, or Maidenhead.
 If the weather is foul we stay at home, and read
 the papers.¹

but there are great moments when he moves smoothly through familiar rhythms into a superb contemporary verse in introit rhythms.

What life have you if you have not life together?
 There is no life that is not in community,
 And no community not lived in praise of God.
 Even the anchorite who meditates alone,
 For whom the days and nights repeat the praise of God,
 Prays for the Church, the Body of Christ incarnate.
 And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads,
 And no man knows or cares who is his neighbour
 Unless his neighbour makes too much disturbance.
 But all dash to and fro in motor cars,
 Familiar with the roads and settled nowhere.
 Nor does the family even move about together,
 But every son would have his motor cycle,²
 And daughters ride away on casual pillions.

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

The pattern of this verse traces the structure of the play. The choral fusion of traditional and contemporary reinforces the juxtaposition of historical present and past and from the combination of these elements evolves the central dramatic and poetic conception, that -

History is a pattern
Of timeless moments"¹

from each of which the whole may be seen in perspective.
Even present existence may be set at arm's length -

In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels
The rabbit shall burrow and the ~~thorn~~ revisit,
The nettle shall flourish on the gravel court,
And the wind shall say: "Here were a decent
godless people:
Their only monument the asphalt road
And a thousand lost golf balls,"²

for the Chorus had apprehended -

The point of intersection of the timeless
With time.³

and at that point of intersection lies eternity, truth,
and, for Eliot, the word of God.

1. T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, 'Little Gidding'.
2. The Rock, Pt.I.
3. Four Quartets, 'The Dry Salvages'.

A year after the first and only performance of The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral was produced at Canterbury.¹ The Rock was quickly and justifiably overshadowed by the poet's second and far greater achievement as a religious dramatist. Nevertheless The Rock is a step towards the integration of poetry and drama into a genuine poetic play. Furthermore, there can be little doubt that it gave rise to Eliot's interest in the possibility of contemporary religious drama and that the writing of it, and especially the experimentation with choral verse drama, served as valuable experience in the creation of Murder in the Cathedral.

The immediate inspiration of Murder in the Cathedral was Eliot's commission from the Dean of Canterbury to write a play for the Canterbury Festival of 1935. Although on this occasion he was not hampered by the propagandist requirements of a church fund, Eliot himself admits the inevitable influence on the play of the circumstances of its performance. He modestly points out the suitability of verse to the occasion and, more important, the almost self-conscious suitability of his audience to the verse.² But if "the path was made

1. Murder in the Cathedral. First produced Canterbury, June 15th, 1935.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.76.

easy",¹ Eliot was not content to let it remain so. Against a setting and with a subject which offered every temptation for the imaginative and scenic orgy of a handsomely costumed historical melodrama, Eliot created an austere and disciplined experiment in the adaptation of Liturgy, choral verse, and miracle play device to the needs of poetic drama in this century. Murder in the Cathedral is the dramatic communication of intense, timeless religious experience. The inner conflict of the soul is a theme characteristically out of time. Subjected to the poetic vision, the incidents of a particular historical situation are employed to express eternal values. Two years after the first production of Murder in the Cathedral Eliot, in an address to the Friends of Rochester Cathedral, criticised the tendency to regard the religious drama of the Middle Ages - "with a feeling of discouragement and timidity that is fatal to the production of anything new,"² and deplored the tepid revivals of this drama as - "a pretty spectacle"³

1. op.cit.

2. 'Religious Drama: Medieval and Modern'. The University of Edinburgh Journal, Vol IX, No.I, Autumn Number, 1937, p.8.

3. op.cit.

avoiding "direct emotion".¹ Here Eliot touches on the nerve centre of the contemporary dramatic problem. Obsequious and lingering backward glances at greatness gone before sterilize not only living imaginative conception, but also true appreciation of former works of art - "if we cease to make we cease to understand".² We must look forward, and we must work out our own salvation - at the cost of a comfortable but barren complacency - "If we want a living religious drama we must be prepared to accept something less sedative, and perhaps something which may cause us some discomfort and embarrassment in the process of getting used to it"³ --- It is only, I think, by attempting to do something for our time that these plays did for theirs, that we can recover the right attitude to these old plays.⁴

Edwin Muir, writing in The London Mercury, said of the play - "The scheme of the action --- is related to or rather becomes part of a scheme of human action in general, seen timelessly."⁵ Indeed, the

1. op.cit., p.9.

2. op.cit., p.8.

3. op.cit., p.9.

4. op.cit., p.10.

5. The London Mercury, Vol.XXXII, No.188, July 1935, p.281.

historical facts of the story are not presented for their theatrical effect. Murder in the Cathedral is not merely a stage presentation of a struggle between secular and religious powers which culminates in the slaughter of the hero. The writing of such a play in verse might well have resulted in a fatal loss of artistic unity, a florid facade arbitrarily decorated with poetic language but having behind it no genuine poetic conception to justify its form: it might have resulted in all that ^{is} bad in Tennyson's Becket.¹ Eliot's play, however, is not a bald narrative disguised by artificial decoration, it has the essential quality of great poetic drama, and indeed of all great art - universality.

Yet it is not enough to say that a work of art, and with particular reference to the criticism in hand, that true poetic drama has universal significance. It is only through the realisation of how this universal quality is achieved that we can approach a true appreciation and understanding of the fundamental requirements of poetic drama. A play is universal when it deals not with outer but with inner reality. That is to say, when it reaches beyond the particular external

1. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Becket, 1893.

events which constitute its plot and reveals human emotions, thoughts and motives which are as true of the present as of the past, and will be equally true of the future, reveals what is unchanging, what we may call the essentially real in mankind. In our ordinary lives and in their representation in the usual prose play which "must be limited to the plane of ordinary consciousness"¹ this deeper level of human awareness is not explored - "But beyond the verge of the nameable, classifiable emotions and motives of our usual conscious life, there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feelings and emotions which we can only see, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye, or in moments of accidental detachment from action. This fringe is penetrated by dramatic poetry at its moments of greater intensity. In great dramatic poetry, a greater range of feeling ~~than~~ can be expressed^{than} in the greatest prose play. In a verse play, as in a prose play, the personages of the dramatist must be true to character, but they can also speak beyond character, and thereby open a window into worlds of which we are commonly unaware".² These hidden springs of our nature which lie beneath the surface

1. T.S.Eliot, 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.15.

2. op.cit.

of everyday existence cannot be expressed in the prose play, for - "the human soul, in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse. --- The tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasise the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse."¹ Inasmuch as it is true to say that the prose play, without becoming "too poetic"² cannot bear the burden of what we have termed the "inner reality"³ of mankind, expressed through human action which provides the external drama, so it is true to say that this external drama alone does not become genuine poetic drama merely through the superficial addition of verse form. The writing of poetry and drama in true poetic drama is a simultaneous action. Poetic language, character and plot combine organically to form "a much richer design"⁴ a design which expresses the permanent essence of human nature. Since true poetic drama is the expression of the universal and fundamental, seen through human action, and through poetry, the surest means by which the

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', Selected Essays, p.46.
 2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.15.
 3. See supra, p. 200.
 4. T.S. Eliot, Preface to The Wheel of Fire, p.XVIII.

universal and fundamental may be verbally expressed, it follows, as Eliot said of Shakespeare's plays, that that which is most dramatic is most poetic - "not by a concurrence of two activities, but by the full expansion of one and the same activity".¹ The poetic and the dramatic pattern, the plot, move simultaneously in "the double pattern in great poetic drama - the pattern which may be examined from the point of view of stagecraft or from that of the music",² for in great poetic drama - "There emerges, when we analyse it, a kind of musical design also which reinforces and is at one with the dramatic movement."³ Genuine poetic drama is a deep imaginative concept carried out in terms of character, plot and verbal music. All three elements are important and all interact organically. Poetry alone is a superfluity, however pleasing - "The beautiful line for its own sake is a luxury dangerous even for the poet who has made himself a virtuoso of the technique of the theatre"⁴ and mere character and plot can be satisfactorily dealt with

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1. 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', Selected Essays, p.52.
 2. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.73.
 3. op.cit.
 4. T.S. Eliot, 'The Poetry of W.B. Yeats', Purpose, July/Dec. 1940.

in the prose play. Great and true poetic drama demands that all the elements which combine to create it be "in the scale of poetry".¹ The plot must be a strong and convincing presentation of some significant human action or conflict, the characters must be raised to a dignity and height at which they are at once themselves and symbols of mankind, and the musical pattern of the language must dramatize the swiftly moving emotions and passions which underlie the external action with - "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".² It is only then that these elements will fuse into that perfection of form and concept "a design of human action and words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and musical order"³ which is - "in a way more realistic than 'naturalistic drama'; because, instead of clothing nature in poetry, it should remove the surface of things,

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1. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.256.
 2. 'The Poetry of W.B. Yeats', Purpose, July/Dec, 1940.
 3. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.85.

expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance,"¹ and in doing so, "except only for preserving the necessary credibility,"² it - "neglects the outer shells of reality, and directly seeks to imitate the core. Or rather, it seeks to imitate in you the effect which would be produced if you perceived with certainty and clarity the grand emotional impulse driving all existence."³

Murder in the Cathedral is based on a deep imaginative conception - the spiritual reality of religious experience, for as Eliot himself tells us - "I did not want to write a chronicle of twelfth-century politics --- I wanted to concentrate on death and martyrdom."⁴ Eliot took advantage of his audience's familiarity with the external facts of the drama to concentrate on the inner meaning of the story, on the spiritual experience of the martyr. The play belies its magnificent box-office title. The essential drama of the play is a drama of the soul. The external drama is

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1. T.S. Eliot, Intro. to Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition, by S.L. Bethell, 1944, p.9.
 2. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Foetry in the Drama', p.260.
 3. op.cit., pp.260-261.
 4. T.S. Eliot; 'Poetry and Drama', p.78.
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treated simply and ritualistically, the killing is "stylised in the manner of a medieval print"¹ or as Miss Gardner words it - "The murder takes place as a kind of ritual slaughter of an unresisting victim, a necessary act, not in itself exciting or significant".² I would point out immediately that my agreement with Miss Gardner's statement³ is not without qualification. Certainly the murder of Thomas, far from embodying the significant dramatic interest of the play, is but a flash of terrible outer action over the true theme of inner conflict, but surely it is intellectually precious to say that a murder which takes place actually on the stage is not "exciting".⁴ The outer action may be inevitable, and important only in so far as it gives impetus to the genuine reality of the spiritual theme, but in poetic drama - "the requirements for a good plot are just as severe as for a prose play: in the one case as the other the essential thing is never to lose the audience's attention but to keep it always excited about what is going to happen next",⁵ and "if you lose it you

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1. The New Statesman Vol.IX, No.226, (New Series), June 22nd. 1935, p.927.
 2. Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S.Eliot, 1949, p.135.
 3. op.cit.
 4. op.cit.
 5. T.S.Eliot, 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.994.

got to get it back QUICK".¹ The physical action of Murder in the Cathedral is brief and even inherently unimportant, but we cannot say that our suspense is not aroused by the entry of the knights, the priests' futile attempts to avert the catastrophe, and the magnificent ending of the martyr hero. Eliot himself speaks of the "musical design"² of poetry which traces the inner reality of poetic drama as "reinforcing"³ and "at one with the dramatic movement".⁴ Furthermore, he freely admits his concern with the slightness of "the essential action of the play"⁵ and with his own immature command of dramatic technique, and that his introduction of choral verse was partly a camouflage measure - "This, I felt sure, was something I could do, and perhaps the dramatic weaknesses would be somewhat covered up by the cries of the women".⁶ Eliot has none of the martyred poet's fine disregard of the requirements of a medium which must consider the direct reaction of the public. This

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Five Points on Dramatic Writing', from a letter to Ezra Pound printed in Townsmen, July, 1938.
 2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.73.
 3. op.cit.
 4. op.cit.
 5. op.cit., p.78.
 6. op.cit.

constant self analysis and exploration of poetic and theatrical technique is characteristic of his dramatic work. It is the way of the true poetic dramatist.

The true theme of Murder in the Cathedral, however - and that which justifies the manifestation of its imaginative conception in "the scale of poetry"¹ - is the spiritual conflict of the saint during the expiation of sin and the rejection of pride which achieves at last the consummate ecstasy, a will made perfect in God; it is the fundamental human reality of religious experience. This theme, expressed through the action, suffering and martyrdom of Thomas, finds at once its finest poetic and dramatic manifestation in the Chorus. The Chorus to Murder in the Cathedral is far more finely integrated with the human drama than was the Chorus to The Rock. In the later play the Chorus not only play their part as spectators and commentators supporting the "musical pattern"² of the drama, but they are also an organic part of the outer "dramatic pattern"³ of events. Thus, being as they are at once in and out of time, they

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1. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.256.
 2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.994.
 3. op.cit., p.995.

can discharge their dramatic function to the full, can "mediate between the action and the audience"¹ and "intensify the action by projecting its emotional consequences, so that we as the audience see it doubly, by seeing its effect on other people."² The Chorus to Murder in the Cathedral are at one and the same time the poor women of Canterbury reacting to a 12th century martyrdom, and a symbol of humanity in the face of the terrible reality of divine experience.

In Greek drama, and in English drama of like kind, such as Milton's Samson Agonistes, the commentary quality of the chorus is distanced by a certain intellectuality in their awareness of the significance of the events in which, on one level, they are taking part. In Eliot's play the consciousness of the Chorus is almost entirely emotional. They are intensely aware of themselves only as witnesses to the dramatic event. They are beyond what is happening in that they see, but they are always part of it in that they do not understand. The Chorus to The Rock was remote and removed from the consequences of the dramatic action. The women of Canterbury are removed from the play only in that they

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

are witnesses taking no part in the events, and that they can directly address the audience "reflecting in their emotion the significance of the action."¹ This emotion is true poetic drama, for it traces beneath the action "a musical pattern which intensifies our excitement by reinforcing it with feelings from a deeper and less articulate level"² and still it remains inextricably interwoven with the dramatic pattern, since the lives of the women of Canterbury are modified by the event which they witness. The change which takes place in them between the opening and the final chorus of the play crystallises the essence of the imaginative conception. The spiritual progress of Thomas is traced through the eddies of their emotion from the fearful deliberate apathy of the opening to the glorious self realisation of the close. Their poetic utterance is entirely functional, dramatising the conflict and triumph of the spirit. We may take for example, the setting of the scene for the opening of the play -

Since golden October declined into sombre November
And the apples were gathered and stored, and the
land became brown sharp points of death in a
waste of water and mud,
The New Year waits, breathes, waits, whispers in
darkness.³

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.78.
 2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.994.
 3. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.I.

This is more than a mere description of a winter landscape; it is the poetic dramatization of a state of mind. The harvest time of the spirit sown by Christ's sacrifice is over, and the human soul lies waste, spiritually dead until another Christian revelation shall bring with it the quickening of a new spring. The frailty of man is such, however, that it refuses spiritual rebirth -

We are content if we are left alone. ---
 -- the labourer bends to his piece of earth, earth-colour, his own colour,¹

humanity clings to its familiar secure spiritual apathy, "the small folk who live among small things"² are afraid of change, preferring the limited horizon of personal fears, joys and sorrows to the terror and ecstasy of the stirring spirit -

Sometimes the corn has failed us,
 Sometimes the harvest is good,
 One year is a year of rain,
 Another a year of dryness,
 One year the apples are abundant,
 Another year the plums are lacking,
 Yet we have gone on living,
 Living and partly living,³

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

and so the women of Canterbury beg Thomas to return to France and leave them in spiritless peace. The significance of Thomas's rejection of worldly temptation is pointed by the bewildered fear of the Chorus -

What is
the sticky dew that forms on the back of my hand?¹

Until now their terror of death has been confined to its physical manifestation in their everyday lives, witnessed and forgotten in the familiar round of action, but now they are faced with the horror of spiritual death -

God is leaving us, God is leaving us, more pang, more
pain than birth or death.
Sweet and cloying through the dark air
Falls the stifling scent of despair.²

At the opening of the second part of the play the imagery of the Chorus is obsessed with death -

The starved crow sits in the field, attentive: and
in the wood
The owl rehearses the hollow note of death.³

Here there is no hope. The old, comforting well known

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., Pt.II.

world has been taken away and nothing is offered in its place -

What sign of the spring of the year?
Only the death of the old: not a stir, not a snoot,
not a breath.¹

There remains only the horror of the unknown expressed through a wild and terrible imagery symbolising the lunatic confusion of the familiar jared by spiritual consciousness into a petrifying chaos.

I have seen
Grey necks twisting, rat tails twining, in the thick
lights of dawn. I have eaten
Smooth creatures still living, with the strong salt
taste of living things under the sea; ---
----- I have smelt
Corruption in the dish, incense in the latrine, the
sewer in the incense, the smell of sweet soap in
the woodpath, a hellish sweet scent in the wood-
path, while the ground heaved.²

and beyond this rending of the spirit the greater terror
of

The white flat face of Death ---
--- the empty land
Which is no land, only emptiness, absence of Void -
-- Where the soul is no longer deceived, for there
are no objects, no tones,

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

No colours, no forms to distract, to direct the soul
From seeing itself, foully united forever, nothing with
nothing,¹

the terror of the final uttermost death of spirit".² Yet
it is in this very fear that the spiritual value of
Thomas's action is to be gauged. In the women of Canterbury
the spiritual consciousness of mankind has been awakened
at first against their will, later through resignation
born of witnessing the movement in another's soul -

I have consented, Lord Archbishop, have consented.
Am torn away, subdued, violated,
United to the spiritual flesh of nature,³

and at length in anguish at the event, but willingly.
In a superb moment of self abnegation those who "did not
wish anything to happen"⁴ voluntarily cry for expiation
of the human soul -

Clear the air! clean the sky! wash the wind! take
the stone from the stone, take the skin from
the arm, take the muscle from the bone and
wash them.
Wash the stone, wash the bone, wash the brain,
wash the soul, wash them wash them!⁵

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1. op.cit.
 2. op.cit.
 3. op.cit.
 4. op.cit.
 5. op.cit.

In the face of this - "the figure of God's purpose is made complete"¹ and the play can end as it does in a choral paean of praise to the glory of God and his saints for -

That which forever renews
the earth
Though it is forever denied.²

In Murder in the Cathedral the promise of The Rock is fulfilled.³ Human action and spiritual significance are inextricably fused in that imaginative unity which is genuine poetic drama. There is organic interplay between the surface and the depths of the play, and a mutual creativeness which gives integrity to the ultimate whole.

Besides carrying the ~~unusual~~ ^{musical} burden of the drama, the Chorus acts as character, narrator and scene-setter, and its constant note of foreboding intensifies the excitement of the plot, a vital function in so slender a train of events. Above all it gives to the action of the play a characteristic sense of timelessness and recurrence

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit., Pt.II.

3. See Chap.II, pp. 131-135.

by virtue of the changeless, unspecific human background which it represents -

We have seen births, deaths and marriages,
 We have had various scandals,
 We have been afflicted with taxes,
 We have had laughter and gossip.
 Several girls have disappeared
 Unaccountably, and some not able to.
 We have all had our private terrors,
 Our particular shadows, our secret fears.¹

This sense of timelessness, an essential characteristic of Eliot's work to which reader and critic must always return, is significant not only in that it endows his poetic drama with the universal quality which is its very nature, but also in that it equips him in his search for a form which will satisfy contemporary needs. The feebleness of contemporary poetic drama is the unhappy result of the contemporary attitude of mind towards this form of art. The modern dramatist has confined his definition of realism to the limited materialistic realism of the modern prose drama, and evolved a conception of poetic drama as a precious art form dealing with a remote subject in a remote language. He has mistakenly alienated it from everyday life. The greatness of Eliot lies in his perception of the twentieth

1. op.cit., Pt.II.
Murder in the Cathedral,

century, not as some extraordinary prosaic period demanding the surface realism of Shaftesbury Avenue, but as a moment in the greater scheme of perpetual human existence, a moment which as yet has not succeeded in resolving the deeper reality of its relationship with this scheme in terms of art. Eliot was to deal boldly with this problem in his later plays, but already in Murder in the Cathedral he is attempting to place his time against the background of eternity by relating the immediate present to the long past. "I wanted to bring home to the audience the contemporary relevance of the situation".¹ To achieve this Eliot supports the invaluable introduction of the Chorus with the use of what he terms as a "neutral"² style, suggesting "both the present and the past".³ The "words and idioms"⁴ which he employs are neither "exactly those of modern conversation, because you have to transport your audience into a period in the past",⁵ nor "conspicuously archaic,

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.77.

2. op.cit., and see also 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' (Adam) p.11.

3. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' (Adam), p.11.

4. op.cit.

5. op.cit.

for you want to make your characters and their situation as real as if the events had taken place yesterday".¹

The basis of Eliot's versification is a formal design ~~continuing~~ ^{combining} the contemporary liturgy which he had employed in The Rock with an adaptation of the alliterative and assonant rhythms and rhymed couplets of Everyman.² Into the groundwork of this pattern are worked familiar colloquial usages,³ a modern adaptation of the seventeenth century sermon, the jazz rhythms of the revivalist meeting⁴ contrasting with the formal introits of the Church, and a miscellany of verse schemes varying from free rhythm to the taut pattern of internal rhyme. As Eliot points out, the result of his experimentation, so far as this particular play is concerned, is successful.⁵ The language of the play holds in solution the present and the past, thus creating an abstract which unites an

1. op.cit.

2. See particularly the dialogue between Thomas and the Tempters. The Rock, Pt.I.

e.g. Or bravery will be broken,
Cabined in Canterbury, realmless ruler,
Self-bound servant of a powerless Pope."

3. See particularly the Knights' scene, Pt.II, and the Messengers' and Tempters' speeches Pt.I.

4. See Pt.II "Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"

5. T.S. Eliot; 'Poetry and Drama', p.77.

historical particular to a universal theme. Above all it is important in that it avoids the overwhelming influence of Shakespeare, which had been the downfall of nineteenth century drama, for "the rhythm of regular blank verse had become too remote from the movement of modern speech."¹ Nevertheless, the problem of a contemporary dramatic form capable of varied modification had not been solved: Eliot had performed a great single artistic feat, but one which could not be repeated - "The versification of the dialogue in Murder in the Cathedral has therefore, in my opinion, only a negative merit: it succeeded in avoiding what had to be avoided, but it arrived at no positive novelty: in short, in so far as it solved the problem of speech in verse for writing today, it solved it for this play only, and provided me with no clue to the verse I should use in another kind of play."² Indeed the dramatist is the first to point out that ~~of~~ one of the most effective means by which the historical event is given contemporary relevance, the "use of platform prose"³ by the knights "who are quite aware

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., p.78.

that they are addressing an audience of people living eight hundred years after they themselves are dead"¹ is a "kind of trick"² a snock tactic "tolerable only in one play and of no use for any other".³ However, Eliot continues to "snock the audience out of their complacency",⁴ and, though in this play he did not succeed in establishing a form for general use, he did at least scatter that "pious mist, timid and thickly traditional"⁵ which was choking the hopes of a living religious drama in this century.

There are many grounds for criticism. The choral section of the play is magnificent poetic drama, but the device - for Eliot admits that the introduction of the Chorus "helped wonderfully"⁵ to fill out the play - is overworked, and the audience, in production, if it does not go so far as Pound, "I stuck it for a while, wot wiff the weepin and wailin --- My Krrize them cawkney

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., p.79.

4. op.cit., p.78.

5. The Times, No.47032. June 17, 1935, p.10, Col.5.

6. T.S.Eliot: 'Poetry and Drama', p.78.

voyces"¹ may well be inclined to find "the cries of the women"² a little too frequent. Moreover, it is a commonplace, none the less true, to criticize Eliot's dramatic work for its lack of action, but though "the substance" of the "first act"³ of Murder in the Cathedral is "shadows, and the strife with shadows",⁴ the medieval allegorical device which objectifies the temptations in the hero's mind provides sufficient external interest to bear the weight of the spiritual drama. A more serious criticism might well be that, with the entry of the Fourth Tempter, the spiritual theme becomes too subtle for translation into theatrical terms - a tendency in Eliot's work which was to recur more dangerously in The Family Reunion.⁵ As Miss Gardner points out - "The last temptation is so subtle and interior that no audience can judge whether it is truly overcome or not."⁶

But the great weakness of the play, a weakness which accounts for a certain bloodlessness in production,

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1. Letters of Ezra Pound, 1951, p.367.
 2. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.78.
 3. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.I.
 4. op.cit.
 5. T.S. Eliot, The Family Reunion, 1939.
 6. Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot: 1949, p.134.

is the characterisation of Thomas. "Thomas is indeed less a man than an embodied attitude, for there is in this play an almost Gnostic contempt for personality and its expression in acts".¹ Thomas is so far a symbol of spiritual perfection during the first three of his temptations that the conquest of the fourth temptation, so nicely conceived as to be theatrically unconvincing, does not raise in us the sympathetic response which should enable the last great act of martyrdom. The Tempters, embodying Thomas's own thoughts, swiftly and brilliantly characterised as they are in the respectively hearty, diplomatic, blunt and intellectual manner of approach, - attitudes which receive their translation into wordly objectivity in the complementary characterization of the four Knights, - these visual abstractions are more real than their prey. The Tempters act and the Chorus suffers, but the perfection of Thomas's will is so inward a conflict that the hero of the play appears static even when he protests -

Is there no way in my soul's sickness,
Does not lead to damnation in pride?
----- Can I neither act nor suffer
Without perdition?²

1. op.cit., p.135.

2. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.I.

The character of Thomas is not "in the scale of poetry".¹ Character is revealed in action not only to the audience but to itself. The characters in poetic drama, having undergone that "certain powerful simplification and exaggeration"² which renders them symbols of humanity, reveal that humanity, through their action and suffering, in "that state of consciousness in which life is felt, for all its malice, as an astonishing power, and we are made to exult in the part we have in life."³ Yet, and this is of primary significance, "Self consciousness at its best is not self-analysis: it is a fire that puts out with its brightness the milder flame of analytic reason."⁴ Thomas is not merely superbly aware of himself as an acting and suffering being as, for example, are Lear, Macbeth, Hamlet and Othello as the consequences of their actions are revealed. For Thomas there is no cry of -

As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,

-
1. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.258.
 2. op.cit., p.254.
 3. op.cit., p.256.
 4. op.cit.

but only an almost priggish awareness of spiritual worth

Death will come only when I am worthy,
And if I am worthy, there is no danger.
I have therefore only to make perfect my will.¹

It was Eliot who said "Shakespeare is one of the rarest of dramatic poets, in that each of his characters is most nearly adequate both to the requirements of the real world and those of the poet's world."² Thomas is not adequate. The greatness of Murder in the Cathedral lies in the Chorus's human resistance and final spiritual conquest. For his audience Thomas is almost purely spiritual. We can neither realise his conflict nor share in his ecstasy.

Nevertheless, Murder in the Cathedral is genuine poetic drama, and the value of Eliot as a pioneer in the search for a new dramatic form awaited for three hundred years, is never more clearly demonstrated than in a comparison between his play and Tennyson's spurious creation on the same theme. The form of Becket is a lifeless imitation of Shakespearian

1. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.II.

2. Preface to The Wheel of Fire, p.XVIII.

drama. There is behind it no deep imaginative conception igniting with plot, word and character into a great art form. The play is a monotonous chronicle of events artificially enlivened with sentimentality, melodrama and pompous blank verse. The characters are the remote and unreal figures of history reciting a spiritless language which has long lost touch with the conversation of the dramatist's own time. The ludicrous gulf between the emotions of the characters and the form in which they are expressed results in a growth of absurdities choking the underlying feelings of the speakers -

Perchance the fierce De Brocs from Saltwood Castle,
To assail our Holy Mother lest she brood
Too long o'er this hard egg, the world, and send
Her whole heart's heat into it, till it break
Into young angels.¹

Tennyson's imagery, far from functioning as a dramatization of his imaginative concept, lies as ornate stucco in the path of dramatic action and dialogue. A single example will serve to illustrate the frequently ridiculous results of this unjustified poetic indulgence. Rosamund describes her first meeting with Henry,

1. Tennyson, Becket, Act V, sc.II.

Then I saw
 Thy high black steed among the flaming furze
 Like sudden night in the main glare of day,¹

an image of gloom in itself inoffensive, but in its context of Rosamund's professed joy in her love for the King, a nonsensical paradox. Becket is a failure as true poetic drama. The poet's dramatic conception is necessarily stillborn in a form already dead. Murder in the Cathedral has a merit which is the very nature of Eliot's poetic drama; it is a living creation.

Two years after the first production of murder in the Cathedral, Eliot said "The creation of a living religious drama in our time is not to be conceived as a problem entirely isolated from that of the secular theatre."² --- If we determined merely to preserve in ourselves two attitudes, one for cathedral drama and the other for the West End, we should be dividing our own minds unjustifiably and with bad result. We need to strive towards a kind of reintegration of both kinds of drama, just as we need to strive towards a reintegration of life."³ At Canterbury Eliot had

1. Becket, Act II, Sc.I.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'Religious Drama. Medieval and Modern', p.10.

3. op.cit., p.12.

presented the reality of religious experience as exemplified by the religious life; he was now concerned with the examination of spiritual truth in relationship to modern secular living. Twelve years later, referring back to his first full-length experiment in the use of a contemporary setting for poetic drama, the dramatist made a statement from which we may take the measure of his significance as a pioneer in the quest for contemporary form.

"If poetic drama is to reconquer its place, it must, in my opinion, enter into overt competition with prose drama. As I have said,¹ people are prepared to put up with verse from the lips of personages dressed in the fashion of some distant age; they should be made to hear it from people dressed like ourselves, living in houses and apartments like ours, and using telephones and motor cars and radio sets. ... What we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre; not to transport the audience into some imaginary world totally unlike its own, an unreal world in which poetry is tolerated. What I should hope might be achieved, by

1. T.S. Eliot; 'Poetry and Drama', p.76.

a generation of dramatists having the benefit of our experience, is that the audience should find, at the moment of awareness that it is hearing poetry, that it is saying to itself: 'I could talk in poetry too!' Then we should not be transported into an artificial world; on the contrary, our own sordid, dreary daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured."¹

The writing of The Family Reunion was an uncompromising act of courage characteristic of all Eliot's work, and especially of that written for the theatre. The poet demanded of himself a contemporary "dramatic pattern"² the underlying "musical pattern"³ of which must be expressed through a contemporary verse form. He did not indulge in the poetical resources of dialect and picturesque setting. His world is our own, a world of newspapers and cigarette cases, of parlourmaids and police sergeants, of family doctors and automobiles. Art which is remote from life is itself no longer living. In the light of this knowledge Eliot came to grips with his own age.

1. op.cit., p.79.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.995.

3. op.cit.

The Family Reunion is a bold and important experiment, but it is not a complete success.¹

Characteristically Eliot disarms his critic by pointing out exactly where his weakness lies; in this case "I had given my attention to versification, at the expense of plot and character."² In the first place the entire dramatic action of the play takes place on a spiritual level. The absence of physical action in the play is partly compensated by the revelation of certain exciting previous actions, but, at the climax of the spiritual action the poet is unable to express the drama of inner reality through the drama of external event. The climax is "a dramatic anti-climax"³ for it "cannot be expressed in dramatic terms".⁴ Amy's question "Where are you going?" is an embarrassing one, and there is a faint ludicrousness^{sity} in Harry's vague talk of disease, deprivation and stony sanctuaries as he prepares to depart in his chauffeur driven car. Furthermore, there is, as Eliot confesses,⁵ a structural weakness in the

1. See Chap.II, pp. 135-7.

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.80.

3. Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot, 1949, p.154.

4. op.cit.

5. 'Poetry and Drama', p.80.

introduction of the short line "lyrical duets"¹ between Harry and Mary and Harry and Agatha. These passages, in which "the speakers have to be presented as falling into a trance-like state in order to speak them"² have the strange, remote effect of "parallel soliloquy".³ Eliot makes the dangerous mistake of breaking the convention which he is attempting to establish. These passages, "so remote from the necessity of the action that they are hardly more than passages of poetry which might be spoken by anybody",⁴ far from expressing "not only the reality of the individual, but the reality of the situation composed of a fusion, in sympathy or antipathy, of two or more individuals",⁵ by arising naturally from the events of the play, have a weird oracular quality which jars violently with the contemporary setting and characters, and leads to the selfconscious banality of Agatha's "What have I been

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. Richard Findlater, The Unholy Trade, 1952, p.141.

4. 'Poetry and Drama', p.80.

5. T.S. Eliot, Intro.to Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition, p.9.

saying?"¹

The theme of the play is characteristic. Once again there is the preoccupation with the atonement of sin, the need for which is realised at the moment of intersection between time and eternity which the poet attempts to express in terms of the world. However - and at this point we touch on the fundamental weakness of Eliot as a dramatist, - the spiritual significance of the drama is greater than the flimsy action of the play can bear. The event which gives rise to Harry's spiritual crisis is not convincingly impressed at the human level of the drama, and the outer action has a thin, shadowy quality which renders it incapable of balancing the inner drama. The result of this is a static, top heavy tendency which is scarcely counter-balanced by the comic relief provided by the younger brothers who never actually appear on the stage. The theme of the play was expressed more successfully in Murder in the Cathedral. In this play the presentation of the spiritual conflict was strengthened by the firm outline of a sequence of events with which the audience was familiar - a familiarity which permitted a weighty

1. The Family Reunion, Pt.II, Sc.II.

interpretation of the plot - and by a balance between the physical and spiritual climax of the action. In The Family Reunion, the solid surface of the play constantly disappears in spiritual vapour, and, as Eliot himself notes, there is "a failure of adjustment between the Greek story and the modern situation"¹ with the result that the Orestes theme,² while broadening and universalising the significance of Eliot's plot, adds to the difficulty of its presentation, especially in that it inspired an attempt to introduce the Furies into the drawing room of a present century country house.³ The reason for the success of murder in the Cathedral and for the comparative failure of The Family Reunion in the presentation of the same basic conception of the need for redemption, is that in the latter "Mr Eliot has attempted for the first time to dramatize the issues which concern him without the support of the visible forms of his faith. --- the intention is to have the Christian view of man's condition emerge from a commonplace setting of secular modern life."⁴

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1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.82.
 2. Aeschylus: Oresteia. 458 B.C.
 3. See 'Poetry and Drama', p.82, "We tried every possible manner of presenting them, etc".
 4. C.L.Barber, 'Strange Gods at T.S. Eliot's The Family Reunion', reprinted from The Southern Review, Vol.VI, No.2, pp.387-416, 1940, in T.S.Eliot: A Selected Critique, 1948, edited by L. Unger, p.415.

--- The Eumenides fail as an objective correlative because Harry's relation to them exists exclusively on a symbolic level which cannot be adequately dramatised in social terms. The relation of a man with the Christian God can be made dramatic because, whatever its symbolic content, the church and tradition give it a form analogous to a social relation, and it has consequences in physical behaviour among men."¹ One is justified in going further - the whole of the external dramatic design of the play fails as an "objective correlative"² to its spiritual content. It is not "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events"³ formulating the emotion expressed in the play. Paradoxically, the expression of this emotion, far from stemming from the circumstances in which it is uttered, constantly rejects them as an irrelevant hindrance to the possibility of spiritual communication. Consequently there is no vital action and reaction between the dramatic and the musical pattern, and the finest poetry in the play is therefore not dramatic.

The unimportance of human action in the play

1. op.cit., p.427.

2. T.S. Eliot; 'Hamlet', Selected Essays, p.145.

3. op.cit.

has serious consequences in the resulting lack of humanity in its characters. The dramatic personae are conceived on two sharply divided levels of understanding. Ivy, Violet, Gerald and Charles are brilliantly presented types of the complacent upper middle class, the possibility of spiritual insight long mouldering under a deadening preoccupation with hunters and delphiniums in military clubs and at clerical tea parties. They are a masterpiece of perception and presentation, but they are, nevertheless, types. Their only measure of spiritual insight is the oracular utterance of choral trance - "another trick, one which, even if successful, could not have been applicable in another play",¹ - which deliberately emphasises the meaningless utterances of their conscious existence. The celebrated aunts and uncles are a cutting criticism of a particular level of human understanding seen generally, but their conception does not allow for the saving grace of spiritual perception, however slight. They are seen, as individuals, entirely on the surface, and therefore they have no human conviction. On the other hand, the hero is seen completely from the inside. With the exception of the

1. T.S. Eliot; 'Poetry and Drama', p.80.

single instant in which Mary's love almost awakens response, and the moment when Harry becomes for Agatha at once the lover and the child she never had - moments which end almost immediately in the recollection of Harry's spiritual destiny symbolised by the appearance of the Eumenides, - the hero has no existence on the surface level of the drama. There is something faintly ridiculous about the idea of Harry taking a "hot bath".¹ This sudden clash between the external and internal levels of the play cracks its dramatic unity, or rather reveals that lack of dramatic unity is its fatal flaw. Similarly Agatha and Mary, though they speak of moving

In the neutral territory
Between two worlds,²

are so highly spiritualised that we have no conviction of their actual existence as members of a women's college. Eliot himself says of Amy that she "seems to me, except perhaps for the chauffeur, the only complete human being in the play."³ In the character of Amy alone there is

1. The Family Reunion, Pt.I, Sc.I.

2. op.cit., Pt.II, Sc.III.

3. T.S. Eliot; 'Poetry and Drama', p.82.

a movement towards an integration of the surface and the depths of the play. Amy has reached the level of understanding to which the women of Canterbury rose after the first agonising stirring of the spirit, and before the final ecstasy of understanding. Her realisation of the reality of death does not pass beyond the fear of "the clock"¹ stopping "in the dark";² she has not achieved a full spiritual awakening

Only Agatha seems to discover some meaning in death
Which I cannot find,³

but she is not deceived by her short-sighted relations whose advice she does not take⁴ and whose faults she keenly perceives,⁵ nor by her own motives in attempting to superimpose her own drama on the inner conflict played out by Agatha and Harry,

I keep Wishwood alive
To keep the family alive, to keep them together,
To keep me alive, and I live to keep them.⁶

1. The Family Reunion. Pt.II, Sc.III.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., Pt.I, Sc.I.

4. op.cit.

5. op.cit., Pt.II, Sc.III.

6. op.cit., Pt.I, Sc.I.

Amy, in fear and jealousy, clings deliberately to what she herself knows to be futile. At moments she reaches below the surface of the drama to depths which she dare not openly acknowledge,

I do not know very much:
 And as I get older, I am coming to think
 How little I have ever known.
 But I think your remarks are much more inappropriate
 Than Harry's.¹

The poetry spoken by Amy is genuinely dramatic. It arises directly from the events of the play as they affect her, and from the insight into the truth of her own existence which arises from the mutual impact between herself and the dramatic situation. Like Eliot's, our sympathies "come to be all with the mother",² and we might go so far as to add that the hero strikes us too "as an insufferable prig".³ Eliot spoke true when he said "What poetry should do in the theatre is a kind of humble shadow or analogy of the Incarnation, whereby the human is taken up into the divine".⁴ In the writing

1. op.cit., Pt.II, Sc.I.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.32.

3. op.cit.

4. T.S. Eliot, 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.12.

of this play Eliot has neglected the human element. Only Amy's action and suffering are played out in human terms of the failure of her plans for her son and her subsequent death. Harry's action and suffering is expressed through a loquacious self-consciousness which alienates our sympathies. The hero of the play is so negligible and unloveable as a human being, that we are drawn rather to the shadowy reality of the relations whom he despises. Furthermore, and this I feel is extremely significant, there seems to me to be a fundamental paradox in the spiritual conception which still further alienates the audience from the hero. Harry is conceived as rejecting life in order to achieve spiritual salvation, but the purely selfish nature of this salvation appears to defeat the poet's own purpose. It is true that Harry speaks of half formed ideas of self sacrifice for others, of "care over lives of humble people",¹ and Agatha of further "agony, renunciation"² but this is entirely inconsistent with the contempt for his spiritually blind relations through which Harry

1. The Family Reunion, Pt.II, Sc.II.

2. op.cit., Pt.II, Sc.I.

is revealed as one chosen to atone human sin. The leaving of Wishwood symbolises Harry's rejection of the security of spiritual decease, but we feel that unless his "until we meet again"¹ is a genuine implication of his return, the physical sufferings which he mentions and Downing's hint at imminent death² are evasions of a more immediate need. Murder in the Cathedral ended in the magnificence of the Chorus's final spiritual realisation; The Family Reunion ends in the death, in fear and only partial understanding, of the hero's mother. The closing cry of the women of Canterbury was a tribute to Thomas's spiritual triumph. Behind Harry is left only a pathetic whimper of rebirth struggling for a moment in what is left of the Hon. Charles Fiper's soul.

It's very odd
But I am beginning to feel, just beginning to feel
That there is something I could understand, if I
were told it.³

The measure of Harry's triumph might have been greater could it have been taken from the spiritual resurgence of the fellow creatures whose soullessness he despised.

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1. op.cit., Pt. II, Sc. III.
 2. op.cit.
 3. op.cit., Pt. II, Sc. III.

Eliot's means of stating his theme are as characteristic as the theme itself. Clearly he looks back to Murder in the Cathedral, and to Sweeney Agonistes, where a hero of cruder sensibility had undergone Harry's torture without reaching his ecstasy. Once again man's spirit stirs in the pangs of rebirth symbolised by the sudden intrusion of nightmare terrors into the security of the ordinary world,

Why do we all behave as if the door might suddenly
 open, the curtains be drawn,
 The cellar make some dreadful disclosure, the roof
 disappear,
 And we should cease to be sure of what is real or
 unreal?
 Hold tight, hold tight, we must insist that the
 world is what we have always taken it to be."¹

Once again the reality of religious experiences flames in a burning sense of the present moment igniting with past and future into an instant of spiritual truth. This instant, this "loop in time"² when "the past is about to happen, and the future was long since settled"³ is the terrible and ecstatic moment of spiritual understanding, when the chosen being is dedicated

1. op.cit., Pt. I, Sc. I.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., Pt.I,Sc.III

By powers beyond us
Which now and then emerge,¹

to suffering and death for the redemption of mankind,
and the "eternal design"² is once more fulfilled.

What we have written is not a story of detection,
Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation."³

Harry, born in the sin and hatred of an intended murder
projected into his own life by the fact of or perhaps
merely the belief in the murder of his wife because of
his hereditary incapability of loving,⁴ is at once

The consciousness of your unhappy family.
Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.⁵

and a symbol of perpetual redemption of mankind through
the potential saint's consciousness of

Some monstrous mistake and aberration
Of all men, of the world, which I cannot put in order.⁶

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1. op.cit., Pt.I, Sc.II.
 2. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.II.
 3. The Family Reunion, Pt.II, Sc.II.
 4. op.cit., "a good that's misdirected".
 5. op.cit., Pt.II, Sc.II.
 6. op.cit., Pt.II, Sc.I.

in private sin, and through his personal suffering and ultimate sacrifice. However, the poet's most compelling means of expressing the reality of spiritual existence is by the rejection rather than the poetic synthesis of contextual events, and is consequently undramatic. It is to this truth that we return for an explanation of the ultimate failure of the play. Action and character on the level of everyday understanding is a necessary evil hindering the passionate spiritualism of the play's musical pattern. As Agatha rejects any progress in the external situation as

A necessary move
In an unnecessary action¹

and as Harry dismisses the spiritually ordinary as people "to whom nothing has happened",² whose conception of the normal is "merely the unreal and the unimportant",³ so the poet in Eliot forgets the dramatic obligation to work not only on the deeper level of musical expression of emotional reality, but also "dramatically, with character and plot".⁴ The result is stretches of poetry,

1. op.cit., Pt.I, Sc.I.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., Pt.II, Sc.II.

4. T.S.Eliot, 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.394.

magnificent in themselves, but undramatic; poetry which does not "intensify the dramatic situation",¹ but hinders the meagre external action with which it is too obviously impatient. Nevertheless, although The Family Reunion, judged absolutely, is not entirely successful, its importance in the development of modern poetic drama can scarcely be overestimated. As an attempt to communicate religious experience it is courageous and vital, a far cry from the charming but simple theatrical narrative of Housman,² or the cheap sentimentality of Jerome's popularised Christian doctrine.³

Above all The Family Reunion is significant as an attempt to evolve a contemporary verse form from the rhythms of everyday speech by one who believes that "the modern verse play can only justify itself when it can show that everything can be said in verse".⁴ In the writing of this play Eliot worked out for himself such a form; "a line of varying length and varying number of syllables, with a caesura and three stresses. The caesura

1. T.S. Eliot; 'Poetry and Drama', p.81.

2. L. Housman; Little Plays of St. Francis, 1922, See Chap.I, p. 79.

3. J.K. Jerome, The Passing of the Third Floor Back, 1905.

4. T.S. Eliot, 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' (Adam), p.12.

and the stresses may come at different places, almost anywhere in the line; the stresses may be close together or well separated by light syllables; the only rule being that there must be one stress on one side of the caesura and two on the other."¹ Such precise application to the technical problems of his art characterises Eliot's attitude to the search for a living modern drama. While forging his own tools he is constantly seeking for a general pattern which may be used by playwrights of the future. Looking back on the results of his labour, Eliot considered that some progress had been made towards "a form in which the most commonplace necessary remarks can be made without sounding absurd, and in which the most poetical language can be employed without sounding affected".² The rhythmical basis of the verbal structure is flexible, and yet the superimposed three stress scheme³ and the avoidance of grammatical elision gives a pleasing grip to the lines. The dialogue is "in verse which seeks in large measure the freedom of prose"⁴ but which has sufficient structural force to bear

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.80

2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.12.

3. See supra, 1.

4. The Times, No.48,260, March 22nd, 1939, p.12. Col.2.

the weight of the spiritual explorations of the drama. This verse is extremely malleable. It moves smoothly from "the most commonplace necessary remarks"¹

Mr John's had a bit of an accident
On the West Road, I fancy, ran into a lorry
Drawn up round the bend.²

into the high poetry of the scene between Harry and Agatha.³ It is a commonplace to criticize Eliot for using verse to express the most prosaic sentiments, and critics delight in citing Charles' celebrated reply to Ivy's request for an evening paper.⁴ Such criticism entirely misses the point of Eliot's intention. Only a poet using a traditional form which has established a habitual response in the audience can afford the use of prose and deep poetry in the same dramatic form. One cannot attempt elaborate variations on a pattern until that pattern has been cut out. The twentieth century poet, who has no traditional pattern, must endure "a long period of disciplining his poetry, and putting it, so to speak, on a very thin diet in order to adapt it

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1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.12.
 2. The Family Reunion, Pt.II, Sc.I.
 3. op.cit., Pt.II, Sc.II.
 4. op.cit., Pt.II, Sc.I.

to the needs of the stage"¹ before he reaches that point "when (and if) the understanding of theatrical technique has become second nature, he can dare to make more liberal use of poetry and take greater liberties with ordinary colloquial speech".² Meanwhile Eliot has to his credit a form capable of the brilliant satirical stylisation of worn out colloquial rhythms used to characterise the spiritual decadence of modern civilisation

Well, as for me,
I'd just as soon be a subaltern again
To be back in the East. An incomparable climate
For a man who can exercise a little common prudence:
And your servants look after you very much better.³

and of the great poetry through which Harry attempts to impart his spiritual experience. Admittedly there is a certain embarrassment in the transition from the commonplace to the obviously poetic, but the fault lies deeper than the structure of the verse form: it lies in the conception of the drama, in the fact that, as we have seen, there is no communication between the two dominant levels of consciousness. It is this which leads to the jarring selfconscious attitude of the 'ordinary'

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.84.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., Pt.I, Sc.I.

characters towards Agatha's spiritual insight,

I don't in the least know what you're talking about. You seem to be wanting to give us all the hump.¹

Amy, the only completely integrated human in the play moves naturally from ordinary conversation to spiritual revelation, and the opening speech of the play,² its flexible rhythm approximating to colloquial speech, and compassing, without sign of strain, stage direction, functional imagery and symbolism, and the expression of the fundamental human terror of approaching death, is the new poetic drama at its best. The Family Reunion, in closing the gap between the language of the drama and the rhythms of everyday speech, injects fresh life blood into an art form which has suffered too long from the death dealing restrictions of photographic realism and of stiff copies of an outworn convention.

The opening night of The Cocktail Party³ is momentous in the history of the drama of this century. After ten years silence in the theatre Eliot stunned his audience by raising the curtain in the name of poetic

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. The Cocktail Party; first produced at the Edinburgh Festival, Aug.24th, 1949.

drama on a tinkle of Noel Cowardian flippancy

- Alex: You've missed the point completely, Julia:
There were no tigers. That was the point.
- Julia: Then what were you doing, up a tree:
You and the Maharaja?¹

With a boldness and eagerness for experiment in a contemporary medium characteristic of all the poet's work, Eliot abandoned the solitary strongholds in the study and the cultured coterie of the unappreciated purist, and beat on the doors of the fashionable theatre. On that very ground which had for so long been the property of the prose drama, Eliot staked out a plot for verse in the theatre. The setting for The Cocktail Party, a world of social inanities, telephone calls, petit fours and an apparently inexhaustible supply of martini, is the setting for the modern comedy of manners. However, there is a greater spiritual significance in the Chamberlaynes' Private Lives.² The essential theme of the play is self knowledge, the reality of human existence as seen through the lives of a mediocre married couple, a film artist, and a potential saint. These four

1. The Cocktail Party, 1949, Act I, Sc.I.

2. Noel Coward, Private Lives, 1930.

characters are given insight into their own existence, each according to his capacity for spiritual understanding, and made to work out his own salvation in the light of this knowledge. Each receives a shock which jars the smooth facade of social intercourse and sets off a train of self exploration in motion. Edward and Lavinia, on the lowest plane of self consciousness, are jolted by the shock of Lavinia's sudden flight into an examination of the truth about a relationship which they have endured for years in easy tolerance. The pain caused by Celia's unaccountable indifference spurs Peter to question the nature of the experience shared by him and Celia. On the highest plane of spiritual realisation, the blow of Edward's refusal to divorce his wife provides the culminating enlightenment of Celia's long awakening soul and releases a spiritual force which questions the very nature of human reality and leads to divine consummation in Christian suffering and death. Once again Eliot concerns himself with that inner truth - the death of the spirit and the nature of reality - which forms the core of the dramatic works already discussed. However, though the theme of the play is yet a further outcome of the poet's dominant imaginative conception, its exposition in terms of the drama is far more subtle and credible than in his previous dramatic writings.¹

See CHAP. II, pp. 137-9.

The sharp division between the representative levels of consciousness which hardened into crude contrast in Sweeney Agonistes and which sterilised communication in The Family Reunion, has here been softened and blended into a complex pattern of varying planes of human and spiritual understanding. Eliot has at last found an "objective correlative"¹ capable of presenting his concept without resort to stretches of irrelevant poetry.

In the first place the external and internal patterns interweave into one rounded pattern which is the true stuff of poetic drama. Character, plot, and language are all aspects of one masterly conception. Until the writing of this play we have been justified in criticising the static quality of Eliot's drama. Of The Cocktail Party Eliot said "I tried to keep in mind that in a play, from time to time, something should happen".² As a result of this there is, in this play, a convincing interaction between the "dramatic

1. 'Hamlet', Selected Essays, p145.

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p83.

pattern"¹ of external events and the "musical pattern"² which scores the spiritual motion within the characters. Human action and relationship are responsible for change within the spirit, and this change again resolves itself into human action. Thus the Chamberlaynes pass from the deadening apathy of being "used to each other",³ through the agony of the blind searching of a reawakened realisation of human existence

With only one difference, perhaps - we can fight
 each other,
 Instead of each taking his corner of the cage⁴

to the quiet happiness born of understanding that they "do not understand each other"⁵ and manifesting itself in friendly preparation for the "consequence of their choice",⁶ another cocktail party. Celia, shaken out of what seemed "the real reality"⁷ of her dream by her own

1. 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.995.

2. op.cit.

3. The Cocktail Party, Act I, Sc.1.

4. op.cit., Act I, Sc.3.

5. op.cit., Act II.

6. op.cit., Act III.

7. op.cit., Act I, Sc.2.

and Edward's reaction to Lavinia's departure, sees at last not only her lover, but the whole of human existence with the eye of spiritual truth, and undergoes a great and terrifying spiritual change, a feeling

Of emptiness, of failure
Towards someone, or something, outside of myself;
And I feel I must --- atone - is that the word?¹

a "trans-humanisation"² which has its dramatic consequences in her terrible death - a death in which the deprivations and agonies vaguely hinted by Harry³ are at length translated into terms of the drama. Meanwhile, Celia's abandonment of Peter Quilpe resolves itself into his disillusioned misery "There was something real. But what is reality ---",⁴ an unfulfilment of the spirit which her final sacrifice turns to self abnegation,

I've only been interested in myself:
And that isn't good enough for Celia.⁵

and which in turn resolves itself, perhaps not quite

1. op.cit., Act II.
2. op.cit.
3. The Family Reunion, Pt.II, Sc.II.
4. The Cocktail Party, Act I, Sc.1.
- 5 op.cit., Act III

convincingly, into a dedication to the making of a great film. The Cocktail Party is not such great poetry as The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral, or The Family Reunion, but is greater poetic drama. There is a genuine conceptual relationship between poetry and drama, a mutual interaction which "weaves them organically into a much richer design."¹

This conceptual unity reveals itself further in Eliot's handling of his characters. In his earlier work the dominant spiritual quality of his conception, expressed poetically at the expense of ordinary dramatic action, gave to his dramatis personae either a flimsy humanity and a prophetic spiritual insight, or a blind social existence with no tremors of perception below the surface level. In The Cocktail Party the inter-relationship between human event and spiritual development rounds the characters to an integrated whole. They exist both at the surface level and the depths of the play. Their self realisation is the more convincing because we see

1. T.S. Eliot, Preface to The Wheel of Fire, p. xviii.

them as they see themselves - Edward and Lavinia, the stolid, henpecked mediocrity and the smug, sweetly domineering hostess, Peter Quilpe the sensitive and conceited young artist, Celia, the social butterfly dimly conscious that she is beating her wings in vain - in the moment when sudden emotional catastrophe tears apart the mask of social security and demands a revaluation of human reality. Only Celia "crosses the frontier"¹ into the unknown, the ecstasy of the spirit at complete self annihilation, and her spiritual victory is expressed in terms which both the audience and the dramatis personae can appreciate. The human reality of Celia's humility and bewilderment in the magnificent scene with Reilly, and the human reality of her devotion to the dying natives translates the divinity of the saint into simple human terms. The agonies and raptures of Harry's² soaring spirit are great poetry, but in true drama we crave "human action and human attitudes".³ All Harry's⁴ spiritual revelation is not so dramatically

1. The Family Reunion, Pt.II, Sc.III.

2. The Family Reunion

3. 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', Selected Essays, p.51.

4. ~~Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.I.~~

effective as the transition from the fashionable society woman who presses Julia to "Go on with the story about the wedding cake"¹ to the devotee of an austere religious order crucified for her faith and for her love of her fellow men. This is great modern religious drama, the doctrine of the perpetual atonement of sin rising from a contemporary situation and expressed in the contemporary terms of modern psychiatry, and yet, when put into practice, retaining the force of its effect on ordinary human lives. For it is not only "the state of mind"² of the dying natives, nor of those who propitiate at her shrine,³ which is affected by Celia's death. Through her sacrifice, Edward, Lavinia and Peter reach greater human and spiritual understanding, as did the Chorus at the close of Murder in the Cathedral through the martyrdom of Thomas. Were the play to be translated into explicit Christian terms Peter might well say "Blessed Celia, pray for us";⁴ his actual "that isn't good enough for Celia"⁵ is no less a measure of her

1. The Cocktail Party, Act I, Sc.1.

2. op.cit., Act III.

3. Omitted after fourth revised impression of text.

4. ct. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.II.

5. The Cocktail Party, Act III.

triumph. Furthermore, even the spiritual agency of the drama may be comprehended on a more ordinary level of understanding. Faced with the problem of imparting religious truth to a notoriously psychological age, Eliot replaces the priest by the psychiatrist and translates man's need for salvation into medical terms of the search for mental cure. The principal director of the spiritual development exists on various levels of interpretation. Reilly is at once Heracles¹ bringing Edward's Alcestis² back from the dead and, in reminding him that "we die to each other daily",³ overcoming the further mortality of mutual awareness caused by mutual familiarity, the priest reclaiming Celia from the death of the spirit in the toils of social superficiality, the psychiatrist healing the minds of a neurotic society, and another guest at the cocktail party. His status as Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly lends credibility to the extraordinary power which he wields over the lives of others, and allows the dramatist to gain sufficient confidence from his audience and from the representatives of modern sceptical society to enable him to pass

1. Euripides: Alcestis, 438 B.C.

2. op.cit.

3. The Cocktail Party, Act I, Sc.3.

unchallenged from the readily accepted power of the medical man to what is, in a disbelieving and materialistic age, the less convincing power of the priest. Only when it is too late to protest does the audience realise the full implication of Reilly's irony, when, at the end of his consultations, he drops his parody of medical jargon and speaks openly as the religious confessor - "Go in peace. And work out your salvation with diligence."¹ Similarly the allusion to the Greek story as a mythical analogy for the spiritual theme of returning from death to life in the soul is used with a more subtle implication than was the earlier clumsy, visual introduction of the Furies.² The song of "One Eyed Riley"³ is equally as credible as the result of the Unidentified Guest's drain on Edward's gin and water as a reference to the rowdyism of Heracles in the house of Admetus before the rescue of Alcestis from Hades.⁴ The allusion to the Greek is indeed so skilfully handled that it almost defeats its own purpose, for Eliot himself points out that "no

1. op.cit., Act II.

2. The Family Reunion.

3. The Cocktail Party, Act I, Sc.1.

4. Euripides; Alcestis.

one of my acquaintances (and no dramatic critics) recognised the source of my story",¹ and though the dramatist deliberately avoids a cumbersome use of his source, employing it "merely as a point of departure"² the reader gains much in his appreciation of Eliot's conception of Reilly and of the theme of spiritual rebirth among superficial social relationships if he is able to recall Heracle's words on physical death

Among his dead
I lay, and sprang and gripped him as he fled.³

In a reply to Iain Hamilton's question concerning the immortal quality of Reilly,⁴ Eliot suggests that on one level of interpretation the doctor might be considered "a god in the machine".⁵ On the spiritual level he is priest, prophet⁶ and confessor, a Tiresias wandering

In the neutral territory
Between two worlds.⁷

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1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.83.
 2. op.cit.
 3. Euripides, Alcestis, v.v. 1142-3.
 4. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', World Review, Nov. 1949, p.21.
 5. op.cit.
 6. See Act III.
 7. The Family Reunion, Pt.II, Sc.III.

However, he has to "accept his limitations"¹ as an intermediary between the ordinary and the spiritual world. He himself is only a servant of that "someone, or something"² to which Celia feels she must atone, fearful of his responsibility in the case of Edward and Lavinia, admiring before the spiritual greatness of Celia—

And when I say to one like her/
'Work out your salvation with diligence', I do not understand
What I myself am saying.³

one of those who, neither reconciled to "the human condition"⁴ nor yet among "the saints",⁵ makes like the rest "the best of a bad job",⁶ but conscious, as is the sincere priest, that he is serving the power beyond him to the utmost of his resources. Reilly's helpers, the mysterious Guardians in the play, present the greatest difficulty to the audience, as Hamilton pointed out to Eliot,⁷ receiving a characteristically uncompromising

1. The Cocktail Party, Act II.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit.

5. op.cit.

6. op.cit.

7. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', p.21.

reply - "Why shouldn't people feel vaguely uncomfortable? I should not like anyone seeing a play of mine to feel completely comfortable. Isn't it fitting for people to feel puzzled?"¹ The difficulty arises when one tries to reconcile the nosy old society woman and the travelled man-about-town with the libation drinkers in Reilly's consulting room at the end of the second act. Yet here again it is only a case of "accepting one's limitations".² Julia and Alex, like Reilly, are intermediaries between the two worlds of the flesh and the spirit; they exist on the surface level because they must adapt themselves to the medium in which they are working. Edward speaks of the "guardian"³ in man as the real self underlying the social facade - in himself the "indomitable spirit of mediocrity"⁴ - the human reality which underlies our mental projection of what we are. Celia, in drinking to the Guardians, suggests that Julia may be hers, and here the conception has expanded to include the idea of a spiritual director protecting the inner reality

1. op.cit.

2. The Cocktail Party, Act II.

3. op.cit., Act I, Sc.2.

4. op.cit.

against the superficial structure under which we hide from our own truth. It is Julia and Alex who recommend Celia and Edward respectively to consult Reilly and so to seek their own inherent reality and work out their salvation. The greatness of Eliot's conception lies in its ability to face up to a contemporary situation. In a society which no longer credits the power of religious spiritual agency, this power is disguised under the apparently casual influence of two friendly busy bodies and the apparently medical supervision of an extraordinarily gifted doctor. Eliot's conception of the need for spiritual awakening is gentler than it was in The Family Reunion. It is no longer conceived in terms of a supernatural terror rigidly dividing the sheep from the goats. The frailty of humanity has been taken into account, and in The Cocktail Party each is encouraged and chastised according to his spiritual capacity; the understanding of one's "métier"¹ in the lesser spirit is as worthy of praise in the eye of compassion as is the perfect self-abnegation of the greater in the eye of judgement. The spiritual agencies of the play are also of a less terrifying nature. They are conscious of the limitations of their own power, and they have existence

1. op.cit., Act III.

in the world of actuality where, with the rare exception of the Celias in life, "The best of a bad job is all any of us make of it".¹ The Cocktail Party is Eliot's greatest dramatic achievement to date. The poet's concern for the human element of character and plot, as well as for the spiritual message delivered through this element, gives to this play the essential unity and balance of genuine poetic drama, that "kind of doubleness in the action, as if it took place on two planes at once."²

Three years after The Family Reunion, Eliot wrote "We have still a good way to go in the invention of a verse medium for the theatre: a medium in which we shall be able to hear the speech of contemporary human beings, in which dramatic characters can express the purest poetry without high-falutin and in which they can convey the most commonplace message without absurdity."³ Looking back over ten years to his first overtly contemporary play, Eliot modestly suggests that some progress had been made in the quest for "A form in which the most commonplace necessary remarks can be made without

1. op.cit., Act II.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'John Marston', Selected Essays, p.229.

3. T.S. Eliot: The Music of Poetry (W.F.Ker Memorial Lecture) 1942, Selected Prose, p66.

sounding absurd, and in which the most poetical language can be employed without sounding affected."¹ When speaking of The Cocktail Party, after twenty years of theatrical experiment and poetic discipline, he openly declares his dramatic manifesto. "For my ambition was, and is, to write a play in verse without the audience having to put itself in a special frame of mind to listen to the poetry. I wanted to write a play in which the audience should be affected, unconsciously, by the rhythm of the verse, without being consciously aware that it was verse they were hearing. I wanted the audience to be aware of the poetry only at intense moments, and I wanted them to feel, at such moments, not that they were listening to lines of poetry by T.S. Eliot, but that the dramatic situation had reached such a point of intensity that it was natural for the characters to express themselves in poetry --- For I think the unconscious effect of verse on the audience is the most important part of its effect, and the best justification for its use."²

In writing The Cocktail Party, Eliot was seeking the "Lowest Common Multiple between poetry and conversation,"³

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' (Adam) , p.12.

2. op.cit., p.13.

3. C. Fry, Poetry and The Theatre, p.8.

and the "Highest Common Factor --- the point to which common speech can be heightened without losing its identity." He was seeking "a form of versification and an idiom which would serve all my purposes, without recourse to prose, and be capable of unbroken transition between the most intense speech and the most relaxed dialogue."¹ He wanted a form in which the poetry, by covering every level of intensity, should be preserved and should have its effect as a single unit. The gulf between poetry and prose - which so often results in poetizing which is "artificial, false, diffuse and syntactically weak",² - should, like the gulf between the spoken and the written language be closed, for "the true dramatic poet will be able to make us unaware of the difference between poetry and prose",³ in that the verse he uses is "a verse capable of both the poetic and the prosaic, so that the transition between one and the other should be imperceptible".⁴ As early as 1923 Eliot had expressed his belief in the importance of the dramatic

1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.83.

2. T.S. Eliot, John Dryden, 1932, p.44.

3. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.14.

4. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', The New York Herald Tribune, Jan 15th, 1950, Sect.V, p.2, col.1.

effect of rhythm.¹ In 1950 he is still writing of the subtle rhythmic effects of even the most prosaic passages of poetic drama written uniformly in verse pattern, effects which "operate on the auditor unconsciously, so that he should think and feel in the rhythms imposed by the poet, without being aware of what these rhythms are doing,"² and which form a kind of "musical pattern which has checked and accelerated the pulse of our emotions without our knowing it".³ Eliot believes that, by the use of this "transparent"⁴ verse, the dramatist can prepare his audience for the moments of intensity in the play, "When the emotion of the character in the play may be supposed to lift him from his ordinary discourse, until the audience feels not that the actors are speaking verse, but that the characters in the play have been lifted into poetry. --- For the effect of first-rate verse drama should be to make us believe that there are moments in life when poetry is the natural form of expression of ordinary men and women."⁵

1. 'The Beating of a Drum', Nation and Athenaeum, XXXIV, i, October 6, 1923, pp.11-12.

2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (N.Y.H.T.), p.2, col.1.

3. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.14.

4. 'Poetry and Drama', p.71.

5. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (N.Y.H.T.) p.2, col.1.

The lucid and gently pulsating poetry of The Cocktail Party is a triumph in the practical application of Eliot's theory. The subtle transition between the ordinary and the spiritual in the character and plot conception is mirrored by an easy flow of versification dramatizing with varying poetic intensity the varying pitches of emotion, from the most prosaic levels to the heights. On the surface level the rhythms of society's banal conversation provide a comfortable basis of "relaxed dialogue"¹ through which "the most commonplace necessary remarks can be made without sounding absurd",² and yet, at the same time, they can, by a more flexible refinement of the device of stylisation used in Sweeney Agonistes, be thrown into an ironical poetic relief

Julia: And he had a remarkable sense of hearing -
 The only man I ever met who could hear
 the cry of bats.

Peter: Hear the cry of bats?

Julia: He could hear the cry of bats.

Celia: But how do you know he could hear the cry
 of bats?

1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.83.

2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.12.

Julia: Because he said so. And I believed him."¹

The three stress lines which form the foundation of the play's versification provide sufficient rhythmical discipline to allow for the heightened poetical conception in the play and yet compasses with ease the lowest level of communication. If, for example, we take even the most prosaic passage

Do you know, I must have left my glasses here,
 And I simply can't see a thing without them.
 I've been dragging Peter all over town
 Looking for them everywhere I've been.
 Has anybody found them? You can tell if they're mine -
 Some kind of a plastic sort of a frame -
 I'm afraid I don't remember the colour,
 But I'd know them, because one lens is missing."²

and place it against one of heightened emotional intensity

I once experienced the extreme of physical pain,
 And now I know there is suffering worse than that.
 It is surprising, if one had time to be surprised:
 I am not afraid of the death of the body,
 But this death is terrifying. The death of the spirit -
 Can you understand what I suffer?³

1. The Cocktail Party, Act I, Sc.1 (cf. Sweeney Agonistes, Fragment of a Prologue:-

Doris: What about Pereira?

I don't care.

Dusty: You don't care!

Who pays the rent?

Doris: Yes he pays the rent etc.)

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., Act II.

we see that the groundwork of the fabric is not wrenched, "the actors are speaking in the same rhythms, with the same vocabulary, as before, and the change is felt, not in awareness of versification, but in awareness of the higher or lower charge of energy in the whole scene."¹ This smooth transition from prosaic flatness to poetic intensity within the confines of a unified artistic form allows the poet to move effortlessly on to the spiritual heights of the magnificent scene between Celia and Reilly,² and even to soar up to the incantatory rhythms of the libation scene³ without cracking the medium of expression. The most serious charge which may be levelled against The Cocktail Party is that Eliot, in his desire that people should "be able to forget that they are listening to a poetic play",⁴ has placed the lowest common denominator between the prosaic and the poetic too low, and that this, added to the result of his resolve "to avoid poetry which could not stand the test of strict dramatic utility"⁵ has so rigorously curbed exalted poetic

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (N.Y.H.T.) p.2, col.1.

2. The Cocktail Party, Act II.

3. op.cit.

4. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', p.21.

5. 'Poetry and Drama', p.85.

utterance that "it is perhaps an open question whether there is any poetry in the play at all".¹ There can, however, surely be little doubt of the answer to the question "whether any of the verse is in poetry",² and, this being so, Eliot is justified by his own admission "in writing the whole play in verse".³ It is true that we miss the sweeping choral passages of The Rock and Murder in the Cathedral, and the great poetic soliloquies of The Family Reunion, but The Cocktail Party's carefully pruned and dramatically functional poetry is greater poetic drama. The poetry in this play is not a magnificent outcrop overshadowing its source; it is truly dramatic, tracing the eddies of emotion which in turn trace the eddies of dramatic action. In his anxiety to avoid 'poetizing' and to approximate the language of poetic drama to everyday speech, Eliot may be accused of the over drastic measures of the innovator. In places his verse shows signs of so "thin" a "diet"⁴ that it comes perilously near to starvation. Nevertheless, The Cocktail Party is fine original contemporary poetic

1. op.cit.

2. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', pp.21-22.

3. op.cit.

4. 'Poetry and Drama', p.84.

drama, approaching, if not quite achieving, greatness. Eliot's words to Hamilton "It seems to me that we should turn away from the Theatre of Ideas to the Theatre of Character. The essential poetic play should be made with human beings rather than with ideas"¹ are of particular significance. The greatness of The Cocktail Party lies in the fact that Eliot has at last achieved a synthesis between spiritual truth and human action and emotion. Every element of the play's form - character, plot, and language - is an aspect of the poet's imaginative concept.

Eliot's latest play² is somewhat disappointing. The Confidential Clerk is a further attempt to present the reality of religious experience in a contemporary setting, and through a contemporary form. In this play Eliot examines human relationships in the light of the Christian doctrine of the need for love and charity which forms the basis of the Christian conception of the brotherhood of man. The entry of Colby Simpkins into the lives of the other characters in the play sets in motion a fantastic relational entanglement on the brilliant

1. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', pp.21-22.

2. The Confidential Clerk: first produced at The Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, Aug. 25th, 1953.

surface level of the plot and at the same time motivates a more significant development of human relationship on a deeper level of understanding. The basic conception of the play is that only through understanding others do we begin to understand ourselves, and only through self-knowledge can we accept the terms of life in humility and human charity, or, if we have the spiritual capacity of a Colby, impose our own terms upon life according to the dictates of Christianity. Interpreted on the spiritual level the play begins in the darkness of individual isolation. Sir Claude and his wife exist side by side with no deeper level of communication than social small talk and an occasional illegible postcard.¹ Eggerson admits that he has never been able to make Lady Elizabeth like Lucasta,² that B. Kaghan has "never hit it off"³ with Lady Elizabeth, and that Lucasta is "something of a thorn in the flesh"⁴ of Sir Claude, her natural father. Meanwhile there exists between Lucasta and B. Kaghan a tentative engagement based on the uneasy relationship of mutual insecurity. Each of them

1. The Confidential Clerk, Act I.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit.

is isolated, not united to the others by the bonds of human sympathy, and in them the poet sees, in miniature, the lack of Christian charity which is at the root of human discord. In his isolation each has constructed for himself a world of "make-believe"¹ which is toughened through contact with the general superficiality resulting from the individual fear until "the make-believing makes it real",² for

If you haven't the strength to impose your own terms
Upon life, you must accept the terms it offers you.³

Thus the disappointed potter becomes a successful financier, the thwarted inspirer of the artist takes refuge in a hotch-potch of 'advanced' pursuits, and the illegitimate couple hide behind the respective facades of

A power in the City,
On the boards of all the solidest companies:⁴

and the bright young thing - carelessly falling in and out of jobs, Colby, in his subconscious struggle to preserve his spiritual integrity against the imposition

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit. Act II.

of strictly practical living, even while he believes himself to be fighting "the disappointed organist"¹ exhales a spiritual strength which sets him apart from the scramble of surface living

He's the sort of fellow who might chuck it all
And go to live on a desert island.²

and draws on those with whom he comes into contact to examine the reality of their own existence and of their relationship with others. To Claude and Lucasta, who are most closely affined to Colby, revelation, both factual and spiritual, brings the greatest suffering, and through suffering, the greatest spiritual refinement. Claude is at once bereft of his son, and of his belief that, in abandoning what was to him "the real world",³ he has atoned to his father, for in submitting to a "make-believe"⁴ world in "obedience to the facts"⁵ he has betrayed his own reality, and he realises too late that

1. op.cit., Act I.

2. op.cit., Act II.

3. op.cit., Act I.

4. op.cit.

5. op.cit., Act III.

I might have been truer to my father's inspiration
If I had done what I wanted to do.¹

To Lucasta, sensitive and in need of sustaining love, comes, after the momentary shock of Colby's attitude resulting from the belief that she is his sister, the more significant realisation that, on a deeper level of communication than that of sexual love, she and Colby would not find satisfaction. Lucasta needs too much and has too much to give to bear the independence of Colby's greater spiritual strength, but, through their attempt at mutual understanding, she has learnt the truth about herself, and in the light of this knowledge, makes her choice

He made me see what I really wanted
B. makes me feel safe. And that's what I want.²

Lucasta has resolved herself at a finer level of insight than that of mere acceptance of the physical facts in her relationship with Colby; even when these facts are shown to be untrue she does not for a moment question her decision. Through Colby's desire to know the factual and spiritual truth about himself each of those who come

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

in contact with him is granted a wish - the truth about themselves both at the surface and deeper level of understanding - after which

All of us have to adapt ourselves
To the wish that is granted.¹

Just before the final revelation of the facts in Colby's case Sir Claude and Lady Elizabeth face up to the truth about themselves and their relationship for the first time, and an outburst of the enlightened Lucasta reveals the truth of the relationship between Claude and Elizabeth and herself and B. Already the suffering unwittingly caused by Colby has created a bond of understanding based on self realisation between Claude and Elizabeth on the one hand and Lucasta and B. on the other. With the loss of Colby, all four, incongruously linked by the ties of blood, are bound at last by the more lasting ties of human love born of human understanding.

The conception of Colby's position in the play is analogous to the conception of Sweeney, Thomas, Harry and Celia. Here we have the characteristic theme of the impact of the dedicated being on the lives of those of

1. op.cit.

~~those~~ of lesser spiritual capacity. Eliot's treatment of Colby has the same quality of human sympathy which went into the creation of Celia. Like Celia, Colby is bewildered by his own spiritual development. At first he is troubled and feels that he must "fight that person" which is his real self, that "something in me" which "rebels"² against the acceptance of the terms imposed by life. Later he realises that, even when he abandons himself to his "garden",³ the life of the spirit, it lacks absolute reality in that, unlike the "truly religious people"⁴ whom Sir Claude has never succeeded in finding, he can establish no "unity"⁵ between the spiritual and the actual world "They seem so unrelated".⁶ It is only when Mrs Guzzard's revelation gives him his "freedom"⁷ from the pressure of worldly ambition and from the claims of all artificial obligations of affection that Colby's spiritual strength is unchained. Now it is no longer the mystic worship of the action of creation personally denied, the longing for

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1. op.cit., Act I.
 2. op.cit.
 3. op.cit., Act II.
 4. op.cit., Act I.
 5. op.cit.
 6. op.cit., Act II.
 7. op.cit., Act III.

A world where the form is the reality,
Of which the substantial is only the shadow,¹

but a strength which is gaining, through knowledge of human suffering and human truth, a sense of the unity between the human and the divine compassed by sympathy and love. The relationship between Colby and the lost father

Whom I could get to know
Only by report, by documents²

is a shadow of the relationship between the spirit of man and Christ. The truth about his origin tempers the spiritual pride of the artist with the humility of the man who understands himself. There comes at last into Colby's "garden" the presence of God³ which he had subconsciously desired, and in that moment all artificialities of personal ambition and relative affection are submerged in the spirit's realization of its own nature, and of the nature of its relationship with its fellow man

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1. op.cit., Act I.
 2. op.cit., Act III.
 3. op.cit., Act II.

Now that I've abandoned my illusions and ambitions
All that's left is love. But not on false pretences:¹

After Colby has made his decision, it is fitting that he should place himself under Eggerson's care. Eggerson, on a humbler social and intellectual level, is greater in human love and understanding than any other character in the play. He has, perhaps inherently, perhaps through the suffering caused by the loss of his son, that very quality which permeates the closing scene of the drama. In him it is manifested in its simplest form, so simply indeed that it is an unobtrusive influence on his associates. Sir Claude quite naturally relies on him to pour oil on the troubled waters of Lady Elizabeth's fantastic mode of travel, and on the more serious investigation of Colby's origin, and Colby's casual tribute scarcely does him justice

But there's one thing I do believe, Mr. Eggerson:
That you have a kind heart. And I'm convinced
That you always contrive to think the best of
everyone.²

Eggerson realises the need for "loving kindness and charitable understanding in human relations",³ and from

1. op.cit., Act III.

2. op.cit., Act I.

3. The Times, No.52,729. Sept.17th, 1950, p.2. Col.5.

this realisation stems what seems at a glance to be an almost supernatural gift for handling people and situations and for finding the best in them. In the final stages of Colby's religious development it is Eggerson alone who understands¹ and who can give him help. Yet Eggerson is not a supernatural agent, but "really quite human";² his half serious terror of Mrs Eggerson, and Mrs Guzzard's realisation that in taking over Colby "you too, I think, have had a wish realised"³ - the partial replacement of a lost son - endows him with a human quality through which he is made convincing in his surface relationship with his associates. In Eggerson's comparatively simple nature Colby's spiritual insight has been directly transformed into the human love and understanding which Colby will strive to achieve. Eggerson has no need for self-knowledge. He has arrived already at a point beyond it, a point which is indeed self-abnegation in love -

Kaghan: You know, Claude, I think we all made the
same mistake -
 All except Eggers ---

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1. The Confidential Clerk, Act III, ("Mr. Simpkins! You'll be thinking of reading for orders.")
 2. op.cit., Act I.
 3. op.cit., Act III.

Eggerson: Me, Mr. Kagan?

Kagan: We wanted Colby to be something he wasn't.¹

Of The Family Reunion Eliot said "I soon saw that I had given my attention to versification, at the expense of plot and character."² With reference to The Confidential Clerk this criticism might well be reversed. On the surface level the drama is Eliot's finest achievement to date.³ In this plot, which finds its origins in the Ion of Euripides,⁴ although there is still a characteristic lack of physical action, the breathtaking succession of revelatory changes is guaranteed to "keep the bloody audience's attention engaged."⁵ One is inclined to feel, however, that the "strip tease"⁶ is not justified in that there is too little of "the poetry"⁷ beneath it for the audience to "swallow".⁸ More significant in the development of the

1. op.cit.

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.80.

3. See Chap.II, pp. 139-141.

4. Euripides, Ion (date uncertain).

5. T.S. Eliot, 'Five Points on Dramatic Writing', Townsmen, July 1938, p.10.

6. op.cit.

7. op.cit.

8. op.cit.

artist is the mature and brilliant power with which he uses the emotion generated by a dramatic situation to vitalise the characters involved. The scene between Colby and Lucasta,¹ which exposes the tortured human reality of the latter, the sensitivity of the unsuccessful artist striving with the crudity of the prostitute beneath a glittering social facade, reveals in Eliot a more powerful human understanding than he has hitherto shown in his dramatic writing. The same may be said of the sympathetic figure of Claude, pathetically, if not tragically, suppressing the stirring spirit in a mistaken sense of duty, of B. Kagan, easily vulnerable beneath a noisily confident exterior, and of Mrs Guzzard, in whom the poet movingly, if a shade sentimentally, presents the essence of maternal love and sacrifice. The character of Lady Elizabeth is particularly engaging. The charming, weak-minded, kind-hearted reality under the assumed authoritative tone

Oh, Claude, you know I'm rather weak in the head
Though I try to be clever.²

and the generosity with which she accepts the truth of the situation and the truth about herself

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1. The Confidential Clerk, Act II.
 2. op.cit., Act III.

Between not knowing what other people want of one,
 And not knowing what one should ask of other people,
 One does make mistakes! But I mean to do better.¹

reveal in her a simple inherent goodness. Paradoxically, she, the last to grasp the factual details of the situation, is among the first to realise its implication, the need for human charity and understanding. The writing of her character at the surface level provides Eliot with a further opportunity to exercise the sense of humour which enlivened the basic "relaxed dialogue"² of The Cocktail Party. Superficially, her fantastic eccentricity and irresponsibility are ludicrously amusing, and in the description, for example, of her despised relatives

They were so carnivorous. Always killing things and
 eating them.³

and of the tragic loss of her husband

He was run over. By a rhinoceros
 In Tanganyika,⁴

Eliot out Coward's Coward with the brilliance of frivolous witticism. The creation of Colby's character

1. op.cit.,

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.83.

3. The Confidential Clerk, Act II.

4. op.cit., Act III.

is disappointing. It is certainly not an advance on that of Celia. The insistence of his companions on his spiritual superiority results in that unfortunate tendency to priggishness which alienated us from Harry. Moreover, on the human level, Eliot does not sufficiently establish Colby in the sympathies of his audience to allow our acquiescence to his dedication to the insubstantial memory of an unseen father in face of the almost callous rejection of Claude and Mrs Guzzard, who have both a strong emotional appeal. In Lucasta's essential analysis

You're either above caring,
Or else you're insensible - I don't mean insensitive!
But you're terribly cold. Or else you've some fire
To warm you, that isn't the same kind of fire
That warms other people. You're either an egotist
Or something so different from the rest of us
That we can't judge you. That's you, Colby.¹

we incline to accept the human condemnation before the implication of spiritual magnitude. The conception of spiritual aspiration refined to Christian love is not rendered convincingly in terms of the drama. The young man thwarted in his ambition to become a great organist and eventually accepting the humble situation in a poor and unimpressive parish church is an uneasy symbol of

1. op.cit.

Eliot's imaginative conception. Colby has neither the spiritual nor the human capacity to illustrate so magnificent a fusion as that of human charity and divine perception.

However, despite the essential "element of amusement"¹ - and here the term is, of course, used in its widest sense - provided by the fantastic and witty plot, and by the human impact of the characterisation, The Confidential Clerk fails as great poetic drama. In this play Eliot has corrected his weakness at the expense of his strength. The "dramatic pattern"² of the play is strong and arresting, but the music has faded until it can scarcely be heard. The rhythms of the lines are the rhythms of fine prose rather than those of subtle subterrene poetry. The nearest approach to poetic intensity is the self realisation of Lucasta, expressed in a fine contemporary verse in which ordinary idioms and rhythms are heightened into an essentially modern form of poetic expression.

No, my only garden is ... a dirty public square
 In a shabby part of London - like the one where I lived
 For a time, with my mother. I've no garden.

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Religious Drama: medieval and modern', p.12.
 2. 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.995.

I hardly feel that I'm even a person:
 Nothing but a bit of living matter
 Floating on the surface of the Regent's Canal.
 Floating, that's it.¹

However, for the most part, the essential reality of mankind, which in genuine poetic drama is fused with the formal elements of plot, character and verbal music, is in this play baldly expressed by the characters who monotonously psycho-analyse themselves in concise measured language. The play is full of the flat, lucid self-consciousness of Colby's

To find there is something that I can do
 So remote from my previous interests.
 It gives me, in a way, a kind of self-confidence
 I've never had before. Yet at the same time
 It's rather disturbing. I don't mean the work:
 I mean, about myself. As if I was becoming
 A different person.²

This cold, clinical dissection lacks the essential spontaneity of the spiritual and human truth which evolves from genuine poetic drama, the "fire that puts out with its brightness the milder flame of analytic reason".³ Eliot seems to have forgotten his own words on the characters in poetic drama, written almost ten

1. The Confidential Clerk, Act II.

2. op.cit., Act I.

3. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.266.

years before - "They must somehow disclose (not necessarily be aware of) a deeper reality than that of the plane of our most conscious living; and what they disclose must be, not the psychologist's intellectualism of this reality, but the reality itself."¹ The characters in The Confidential Clerk are large human figures with large emotional capacity. They are indeed "in the scale of poetry",² but to small avail; the dramatist has given them little poetry in which to express themselves.

Nevertheless, though Eliot's most recent play does not come up to the expectations we had of the author of The Cocktail Party, we must not, in closing our estimate of the essential value of his drama, belittle his achievement. With greater insight and determination than any other dramatist of this century, Eliot has persistently striven to work out a form which may pass into general use for the refinement and improvement by the dramatists of the future, and, in addition to this great task, he has given back to religious drama the living force of contemporary relevance. Much remains to be done, for "no man can invent a form, create a taste

1. T.S. Eliot, Intro. to Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition, p.8.

2. 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.256.

for it, and perfect it too",¹ and the ultimate evolution of a traditional form for contemporary poetic drama is "something which can only be elaborated by the experiment of more than one generation of dramatic poets".² Perhaps at some future date the "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"³ may be substantiated. If this is so, the debt to Eliot as a pioneer and an experimentalist, will, by the very fulfilment of his own aspirations, be paid.

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.442.
 2. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', p.22.
 3. 'Poetry and Drama', p.85.

CHAPTER IV

The Dramatic Criticism of T. S. Eliot

In an age dominated by the fragmentary expository and interpretive criticism of the popular intellectual press, Eliot has produced a body of criticism which forms a unity worthy of consideration as a theory of abstract aesthetics. This critical approach is characterised by a fundamental insight into the creative action, a facility for reaching beyond the ultimate work of art to comprehend the basic relationship between the imaginative conception and the artistic technique, and his understanding of the creative process within himself throws light, forward and backward, between his active and his contemplative approach to poetic drama. In Eliot the critic, as in Eliot the playwright, a balance is found between the aspirations of the pure artist and the practical aims of the dramatic pioneer. The creative criticism of the artist, embodied in the aesthetic theory partly formulated and partly to be deduced from his work, provides the pioneer with a standpoint from which he may direct and control his followers in the quest for a

contemporary dramatic form capable of future modification and refinement. It is only by a full understanding of the creative process, and of its relationship to ultimate form, that we can hope to adapt this process to the needs of our own time.

Of primary importance is Eliot's differentiation between the poetic and the prose play, and his insistence on the essentially organic relationship of poetry to the drama. That which sets Eliot above the majority of the dramatists of the nineteenth century, and gives integrity to his own dramatic work, is his realisation that verse drama is not prose drama plus the "embellishment"¹ of versification, not "merely a decoration of a dialogue which could, as drama, be as well put in prose."² written by "a man skilled in the arts and skillful to weave them together,"³ not "a play done into verse,"⁴ but a distinct form of art, "a different kind of play,"⁵ "different and more profoundly dramatic,"⁶ a much richer design."⁷

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama,' p.68.
 2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.14.
 3. T.S. Eliot, Preface to The Wheel of Fire, XVII
 4. T.S. Eliot, Intro to Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition, p.9.
 5. op.cit.
 6. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama,' pp.14-15.
 7. Preface to The Wheel of Fire, p.XVIII.

In stressing that "a true verse play is not a play translated into verse, it is conceived and carried out in terms of verse"¹ Eliot recalls Abercrombie's statement that "the obvious difference between a verse-dramatist and a prose-dramatist is that one makes his characters talk verse, the other prose; but that is not the only difference we have to consider. That ~~N~~ is only the outer sign of a profounder difference, a difference of conception. We must be clear then that a poetic play is not a play that might have been written in prose, but happens to be written in poetry,"² and places poetry in its true perspective as an aspect of the primary conceptual difference between the poetic and the prose play.

Organically related to this conceptual distinction is the poet's appreciation of the ultimate value of poetic drama and of its superiority over that written in prose. Eliot's view of this ultimate value is clearly related to that of his near contemporaries, and involves their significant further distinction between the deceptive 'realism' of the prose

1. T.S. Eliot, 'The Need for Poetic Drama,' p.994.

2. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,' p.253.

play, and the genuine reality of verse drama. This distinction makes clear that the photographic naturalism of prose drama is merely an imitation of actuality, the surface motion of living conceived by Yeats as the "whirling circumference"¹ and by Abercrombie as "the ready-made boot of existence."² It is "the substitution of apparent for real truth."³ This "real truth", whether we call it the "innermost", the "spiritual", the "emotional"⁴ reality, or the "self-evident truths"⁵ which underlie the outward expression of human existence, is the concern of true verse drama. If reality be conceived as Abercrombie conceived it, as "a set of Chinese boxes, an inner one still fitting inside the last one opened,"⁶ the prose drama concerns itself with the "outermost reality"⁷

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1. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, 1923, p.98.
 2. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,' p.259.
 3. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.156.
 4. 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,' p.259.
 5. W.B. Yeats, The Death of Synge, 1928, p.20.
 6. 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,' p.259.
 7. op.cit., p.259.

of superficial word and action, while the poetic drama embodies that "innermost reality,"¹ those permanent features of our state of being which defy the specific confines of time and space, and form "the general substratum to all existence."² Prose drama deals in "the continual restless mimicries of the surface of life,"³ poetic drama in "the nobler movements that the heart sees, the rhythmical movements that seem to flow up into the imagination from some deeper life than that of the individual soul."⁴ The idea that prose drama, in reproducing the outward appearance of everyday speech and action which we call living, presents us as we are, is mistaken; it presents us only as we seem. Our ever recurring human truth is expressed through the verse drama which, in passing beyond the particular to the generic "except only for preserving the necessary credibility, neglects the outer shells of reality, and directly seeks to imitate the core. Or rather, it seeks to imitate in you the effect which

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. W.B. Yeats. Plays and Controversies, 1923, p.49.

4. op.cit., p.48.

would be produced if you perceived with certainty and clarity the grand emotional impulse driving all existence,"¹ and, in the performance of this supreme function of spiritual communication, "poetic drama is "in a way more realistic than 'naturalistic drama', because instead of clothing nature in poetry it should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance. It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency. It may use any device to show their real feelings and volitions, instead of just what, in actual life, they would normally profess or be conscious of."² It cuts through the surface of human existence to reveal the "vision of the heart of life,"³ and "to examine the life itself, the master cell,"⁴

For Eliot then, as for his fellow champions

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1. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama' p.260-1.
 2. Intro. to Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition, p.9.
 3. J. Masfield, Preface to The Tragedy of Nan, 1911.
 4. J. Masfield, 'Playwriting,' Recent Prose, p.117.

of poetic drama in this century, the value of verse drama is the value of an artistic medium capable of immediate and vivid communication of spiritual truth. In great poetic drama the dramatist speaks directly to the souls of his audience recreating in them the spiritual experience undergone at the moment of imaginative conception. In prose drama, the ~~poet's~~ ^{playwright's} obligation to the surface level of his naturalistic presentation stultifies the revelation of the truth beneath the actual, and in the characters of prose drama any stirring of the hidden chords of being must necessarily result in 'poeticizing', sentimentality, or a charged pause in speech and action during which the moved characters "look silently into the fireplace" - 'silently' because they are limited by their very conception to lifeless social intercourse and 'have no artistic and charming language except light persiflage and no powerful language at all.'¹ Only the heightened conceptual form of poetic drama allows for full spiritual intercourse between the playwright and his audience, and permits the speaking and listening spirit to pass beyond "the plane of ordinary consciousness."² to "some other

1. W.B. Yeats, The Cutting of an Agate, 1918, p.77.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Aims of Poetic Drama,' (Adam) p.15.

plane of reality."¹ Prose drama may present, in the concentrated orderliness which every form of art demands, "the world of our ordinary awareness from a particular point of view, and thus sharpen our perception of that world. It can show us more of that world, of the relations and conflicts between persons or types of person, than we see for ourselves while immersed in the ordinary business of living. The characters must, however, behave according to our ordinary understanding of types, as separate and self-contained individuals having the same kind of existence as that of which we are ordinarily aware,"² but the greater scope of verse drama allows its characters to "disclose (not necessarily be aware of) a deeper reality than that of the plane of our most conscious living,"³ and, while they maintain credibility by being "true to character" on the surface level of actual existence, "they can also speak beyond character, and thereby open a window into worlds of which we are

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'John Marston', Selected Essays, p.229.
 2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama,' (Adam) p.15.
 3. Intro. to Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition, p.8.

commonly unaware,"¹ for "beyond the verge of the nameable classifiable emotions and motives of our usual conscious life, there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feelings and emotions which we can only see, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye, or in moments of accidental detachment from action. This fringe is penetrated by dramatic poetry at its moments of greater intensity."²

In genuine poetic drama there is "a greater range of feeling than can be expressed in the greatest prose play,"³ because the dramatist is dealing, not with "the ephemeral and superficial"⁴ of the naturalistic imitation, but breaking through the cramping limitations of the particular to the apprehension and communication of "the permanent and universal,"⁵ and, most important, of "the stratum of truth permanent in human nature."⁶

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama,' (Adam), p.15.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

4. T.S.Eliot, 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', Selected Essays, p.46.

5. op.cit.

6. T.S. Eliot, 'Thomas Middleton,' Selected Essays, p.163.

The greatness of Eliot, both as a writer and critic of verse drama, lies in his realisation that genuine poetic drama is a form of art, distinct by its very conception from the prose play, and from the false verse play in which poetry is decorative rather than organic. The ultimate value of true poetic drama is its conceptual value, a heightening and intensification of the imagination which finds a corresponding heightening and intensification in its formal communication. Through his very conception of poetic drama as a means of immediate spiritual communication of primary human truth Eliot illustrates his belief that its imaginative poetry goes deeper than its formal expression,¹ that "a true verse play is not a play translated into verse, it is conceived and carried out in terms of verse."² This belief gives integrity to his view of the function of poetry in drama; above all it rejects that arbitrary use of poetry which is the elemental flaw in the dramatic work of the nineteenth century, and insists that poetry

1. We may take, for example, the later plays of Ibsen, which are intensely poetic in concept although the dramatist does not extend his formal substantiation of this concept to overt verbal poetry. See Chap.I pp. 5-6.

2. T.S.Eliot, 'The Need for Poetic Drama,' p.994.

must "justify itself dramatically,"¹ must stand up to "the test of strict dramatic utility."²

Where Eliot fails us, in his theory as in his practice, is in his tendency to sublimate the importance of the human element of character. His statement that "no play should be written in verse for which prose is dramatically adequate"³ reveals a healthy attitude to the organic function of poetry in the drama, but he omits to expand his aesthetic theory to cover the imaginative heightening, at the conceptual level, of every element in the poetic play, and of the consequent mutual creativeness of these elements. He is inclined to presuppose the organic relationship between the poetry of the verse play and its characters, and between characters and basic concept. While acquiescing to the essential integration between the language of the dramatist and his imaginative conception, and insisting that the "dramatic situation" should reach "such a point of intensity" that it is "natural for the characters to express themselves in poetry,"⁴ he fails to make explicit the initial

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.68.
2. op.cit., p.83.
3. op.cit., p.68.
4. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama,' (Adam), p.13.

conceptual intensification of character which automatically demands the heightened formal expression of poetry.

In 1928 Eliot issued a warning to artistic pioneers "if you want form, you must go deeper than dramatic technique."¹ Sixteen years previously this warning had been anticipated by Abercrombie's 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,'² in which depths were sounded which Eliot, in his critical work, tends to assume. Abercrombie, like Eliot, insists that verse drama is not merely prose drama decorated with a formal design, but that the character's use of verse ~~or~~ prose in a play "is only the outer sign of a profounder difference, a difference of conception."³ Like Eliot he conceives poetic drama as a distinct form of art, but, unlike his near contemporary, he overtly develops the vital question of the imaginative heightening of concept in his analysis of the process which results in the ultimate poetic dramatic form. Eliot states a profound critical truth when he says "no play should be

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1. 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry,' Selected Essays, p.49.
 2. English Critical Essays, 1933, edited by P.N. Jones, pp.252-272.
 3. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,' p.253.

written in verse for which prose is dramatically adequate,"¹ a truth of which Abercrombie was also aware - "We must be clear then that a poetic play is not a play that might have been written in prose, but happens to be written in poetry."² Where Eliot's criticism falls short of Abercrombie's theory of abstract aesthetics is in his omission to define and enlarge upon every facet of the fundamental conceptual difference between the genuine poetic drama and the play "for which prose is dramatically adequate."³ A brief comparison between these two major bodies of critical theory reveals in Eliot a tendency to assumption and to apparently disproportionate values. Abercrombie's criticism reaches back to the primary creative impulse, the "conceptual poetry"⁴ of which ultimate form is only "the outer sign."⁵

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1. T.S.Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama,' p.68.
 2. 'The Function of Poetry in ^{the} Drama,' p.253.
 3. 'Poetry and Drama,' p.68.
 4. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,' p.256.
 5. op.cit., p.253. See also L. Abercrombie, Towards a Theory of Art, p.96, "Form in technique is the symbol of unity in conception."

He points out the creative relationship not only of the dramatist's language, but also of the human element in the play to the need for spiritual communication which is artistically translated into poetic conception. In "the kind of play" which he would allow to be that distinct art form, the poetic drama, "the characters themselves are poetry, and were poetry before they began to speak poetry: it would be a wrench for them not so to utter themselves."¹ The characters in verse drama "have undergone a certain powerful simplification and exaggeration, so that the primary impulses of being are infinitely more evident in what they do and say than in the speech and action of actuality's affairs."² They have, indeed, become large symbols of that permanent human reality, the consciousness of which is recreated in the mind of the recipient through the medium of the ultimate form. In them "the confusion of forces which make up the impulsion of ordinary life" has been "simplified to a firm arrangement of conflict" and "every force which moves in them is made thereby to be of intense unobstructed significance."³ The characters in true poetic drama are

1. op.cit., p.254.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., cf. also L.Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study, p.18. "Life has at last been perfectly formed and measured to man's requirements: and in art man knows himself truly the master of his existence, etc."

"in the scale" of the "conceptual poetry."¹ It follows that the manner in which they express themselves must inevitably be in the same scale as the characters. The "intense unobstructed significance" of the living impulses which have been concentrated into their creation, must find utterance in "the intense unobstructed significance which words can only have in poetry."² The "simplification and exaggeration" of character into generic symbols must of necessity lead to a corresponding exaggeration and simplification of their language" out of the grey complexity of ordinary speech into an ordered medley of colour;"³ the "exaggerated shapeliness of personality"⁴ is complemented by "exaggeration in the shape of the speech they utter."⁵ Abercrombie has come back to his guiding principle - "the characters themselves are poetry, and were poetry before they began to speak poetry: it would be a wrench for them not so to utter themselves."⁶

1. op.cit., p.256.

2. op.cit., p.254.

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit.

5. op.cit., p.255.

6. op.cit., p.254.

Abercrombie's critical theory assumes nothing. It involves a detailed examination of every aspect of the relationship between inspiration, the spiritual urge, and form, the communicative symbol. In the poetic drama he conceives this spiritual urge as the poet's "sense of life,"¹ his joy in "the grand emotional impulse driving all existence,"² and creatively substantiated by vivid characters and heightened language. The poet rejoices in the ordered concentration of art, which, in imposing its terms on ordinary life, moulds it to fit "man's requirements,"³ excites in him a consciousness of himself as "the master of his existence,"⁴ and produces that "state of being in which we find it something of an exultation to know that we are ourselves,"⁵ that "state of astonishment that glows to perceive with unexpected force that splendid fact, that fact that we do exist."⁶

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1. L. Abercrombie, The Idea of Great Poetry, 1925, p.150.
 2. 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,' p.261.
 3. Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study, 1912, p.18.
 4. op.cit.
 5. 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,' p.264.
 6. op.cit., p.256.

This awareness of ourselves and of all existence is effected through the characters of poetic drama, which are raised and intensified to a higher pitch of being than that of ordinary humans. Through them "the current of life flows... at a fiercer strength" and "the resistance of the characters to the current, and their consequent incandescence, is also fiercer."¹ They have been harmonised by art from the drifting shapelessness of ordinary living into bold outline, and they are consequently more alive, more real to us than life itself. Spiritual reality, the truth of our being, our desire for life and our will to live are embodied in these generic symbols, and it follows that their utterance is the direct communication of the emotional reality with which they burn. It is, therefore, as Abercrombie points out, quite natural for them to speak in poetry; they could not do otherwise. By making a thorough exploration of the dramatic process, from conception, through creation to ultimate form, Abercrombie is able to base his critical theory on the great truth of genuine poetic drama, which is that every element of form - character, action, setting and language - is an aspect of concept, and all are

op.cit.

mutually creative in the communication of the dramatist's spiritual experience.

The integrity of Eliot's attitude towards the essentially functional nature of poetry in the drama, implies Abercrombie's fully developed theory of form as an aspect of poetic concept. On at least one occasion he reveals a fine perception of this truth. "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... The artistic 'inevitability' lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion."¹ Here he is touching on the root of the genesis of art. However, his conception of the relationship of character to ~~this~~ genesis, and especially of the consequent functional relationship between character and dramatic speech can only be constructed by a synthesis of fragmentary comments gleaned from his critical writings. On this point his critical observations are not followed through and expanded to form an abstract aesthetic theory.

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Hamlet', Selected Essays, p.145.

Eliot recognises the necessity for characterisation in the drama, both with reference to its more obvious function - "it is in recognising the identities and differences between characters on the stage and ourselves and the people we have known, that we get out serious impression of a play,"¹ and to its function as a communicative symbol of imaginative conception which should "replace" the "philosophy"² of the dramatist, and substantiate his view of life with a "poetic vision,"³ a "world which the author's mind has subjected to a process of simplification."⁴ He is also constantly aware of the concern of poetic drama with large, generic human effects, that its essential content is "the permanent struggles and conflicts of human beings,"⁵ and that the greatest drama is "occupied with great and permanent moral conflicts."⁶ In speaking of Middleton's The Changeling, he excuses the absurdity of the plot to the modern mind, and extenuates the faults which he finds

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama,' (Adam), p.15.
2. 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama,' p.444.
3. 'The Duchess of Malfi at the Lyric,' Art and Letters, III, 1. Winter 1919/20.
4. 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama,' p.446.
5. 'The Need for Poetic Drama,' p.995.
6. 'Thomas Middleton,' Selected Essays, p.165.

in the play, because he finds there also "the stratum of truth permanent in human nature;" the play has a "permanent" quality, it is an "eternal tragedy"¹ and it is this which makes it great. Similarly he is willing to endure the ribaldry and tedium which offend him in Women Beware Women, because, beneath the conventional surface of his form, Middleton "has caught permanent human feelings."² However, the conclusions which Eliot draws, might as well be the result of the sensitive critical mind appreciating from the effect of the poetic drama, as the creative mind exploring its process. The critic does not clearly trace the generic human quality of the great play back to its source in the conceptual intensification of its characters. He does not overtly expand his view to include the initial raising of humanity "to an intense~~r~~ pitch of heat,"³ to what Masfield a shade sentimentally calls the "calm, wise, gentle people who speak largely from a vision detached from the world,"⁴ and to the level of the primary simplicity

1. op.cit., p.163.

2. op.cit., p.166.

3. 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,' p.256.

4. J. Masfield, Shakespeare, 1911, p.74.

of those people whom Synge made articulate, "men and women who under the weight of their necessity lived, as the artist lives, in the presence of death and childhood, and the great affections and the orgiastic moment when life outleaps its limits."¹

His observations on Massinger lead him to the brink of the aesthetic depths of the conceptual function of character in the creation of poetic drama's ultimate form. He points out that character, to be "living" and "moving", must have "some emotional unity," must be composed of "parts which are felt together," not "scattered observations of human nature."² "A 'living' character is not necessarily 'true to life'. It is a person whom we can see and hear, whether he be true or false to human nature as we know it. What the creator of character needs is not so much knowledge of motives as keen sensibility; the dramatist need not understand people; but he must be exceptionally aware of them."³ Here we have an implication of the need for great and simple

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1. W.B. Yeats, 'Synge and the Ireland of his Time,' 1910, The Cutting of an Agate, pp.151-2.
 2. T.S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger,' Selected Essays, p.212.
 3. op.cit.

effects in the characters of poetic drama, for characters which are not minutely psycho-analysed, but which embody strong generic emotions and may stand as symbols of spiritual reality and unchanging human truth. Indeed Eliot himself says "it is not for the dramatist to produce an analysed character, but for the audience to analyse the character. When the dramatist is creative, then the more creative the dramatist, the greater varieties of interpretation will be possible," and adds, significantly, "drama is not poetic merely because it is in verse."¹ Moreover, he approaches closely to Abercrombie's conception of the "powerful simplification and exaggeration"² of character when he says of the characters of Jonson and Shakespeare, and "perhaps of all the greatest drama," that they are "drawn in positive and simple outlines," which may be filled in, and yet retain "a clear and sharp and simple form."³ This conception of the fundamental simplification and intensification of character may, through Eliot's specific reference to Shakespeare, be related to his estimate of

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1. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party,' World Review, Nov. 1949, pp.19-22.
 2. 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama,' p.254.
 3. T.S. Eliot, 'Ben Jonson,' Selected Essays, p.152.

the ultimate value of poetic drama. In Shakespeare's characters Eliot finds "more resources... than in most of the personages of modern prose drama, and the way of interpreting them are endless."¹ The plays of Shakespeare have a "provocative power" to "suggest ideas to those who hear and read them" which endows them with that permanent universal quality which is the stamp of the "great play", the play with enduring power to "affect different people differently", to be "capable of innumerable interpretations," and to "have a fresh meaning for every generation."² It is the reader, however, who must span a period covering thirty years³ of Eliot's critical writing to evolve a relationship between conceptual cause and ultimate effect.

The effect is not overlooked, but the process by which it is achieved is not reconstructed. Eliot conceives the supreme function of the verse play as the satisfaction of "one form of the desire of human beings to achieve greater dignity and significance than they

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1. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party,' p.22.
 2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama,' (Adam), p.16.
 3. 'Ben Jonson', 1919. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party' and 'The Aims of Poetic Drama,' 1949.

seem to do in their private or indeed public lives,"¹ and the providing of "a stimulant to make life more tolerable and augment our ability to live."² Here he looks back to Abercrombie's theory that the harmonious triumph of artistic order over the chaos of everyday life arouses in man that sense of mastery over his existence which is the most noble spiritual experience of which the drama is capable. Eliot omits, however, to recreate fully the action by which the artistic triumph is brought about. He barely implies the human perspective into which he places the use of dramatic poetry - "it should stimulate partly by the action of vocal rhythms on what, in our ignorance, we call the nervous system."³ We inquire in vain after the critic's assurance of a firm grip on the the character in the function of the genesis of art, of his belief that, in genuine verse drama, every element of form is an aspect of concept, and all are mutually creative in its formal manifestation.

Eliot's grasp of the importance of character in the governing "scale... of conceptual poetry"⁴ which

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1. 'Religious Drama: Mediaeval and Modern,' p.12.
 2. Intro. to Savonarola, p.XI-XII.
 3. op.cit. (my emphatics).
 4. 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama' p.256.

gives integrity to the use of verse form in drama, is at its weakest in his personal and constructive approach to this question, and to its contemporary implications. Here he is almost self-consciously tentative. He is "tempted" to "suggest" that "drama is not made with ideas but with human beings";¹ it "seems" to him "that we should turn away from the Theatre of Ideas to the Theatre of Character. The essential poetic play should be made with human beings rather than with ideas."² There is here an unbecoming sense of astonishment and discovery, a groping exploration of ground which should be the freehold of poetic drama. The critic's comprehension of the fundamental relationship between verse drama and those primary, permanent human emotions and impulses with which, at its finest, it is concerned, lacks assurance and vitality. Too frequently it is deductive rather than constructive.

Despite his unfortunate presupposition of the functional significance of character in the verse play, Eliot has made abundantly clear, in one of his latest critical discourses, his belief that dramatic form is

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam) p.16.

2. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party,' p.22.

an aspect of imaginative concept in genuine verse drama. The Spencer Memorial Lecture¹ culminates in the critic's presentation of a "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."² This is the manifesto of a belief basic to Eliot's dramatic criticism. He conceives the poet dramatist as working simultaneously on two levels, weaving - "and this not by a concurrence of two activities, but by the full expansion of one and the same activity."³ - a "dramatic" and a "musical"⁴ pattern, which in the very process of creation are "organically"⁵ interwoven into "a much richer design."⁶

The writer of verse drama is distinct from the poet or the prose dramatist; he is "not merely a man skilled in two

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1. Delivered at Harvard University, 21 November, 1950.
 2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.85.
 3. 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry,' p.52.
 4. 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.994.
 5. Preface to The Wheel of Fire, p.XVIII.
 6. op.cit., p.XVII.

arts and skilful to weave together", but one who has discovered "the laws, both of another kind of verse and another kind of drama."¹ Here Eliot touches on the nerve of creative activity in the verse drama. The imaginative conception of the poetic dramatist is, by a simultaneous creative process translated at one and the same time into terms of action and of poetry, into "dramatic form" and also into "the musical pattern which can be obtained only by verse," and "the two forms must be one."² The "two forms" are "one" in that they are both aspects of one concept, and are therefore organically united into that distinct form of art, that "different kind of play"³ which is genuine poetic drama. Since the poetry and the drama of true verse drama are thus organically united, it follows, as Eliot points out, that "any poetic intensity, in a play, will be dramatic intensity as well."⁴ The two aspects of the poet dramatist's conception, being as they are "the full

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1. Intro. to Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition, p.9.
 2. T.S. Eliot, 'Audiences, Producers, Plays, Poets,' New Verse, No.18. Dec.1935, p.4.
 3. Intro. to Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition, p.9.
 4. 'The Duchess of Malfi at the Lyric.'

expansion of one and the same activity"¹ are mutually creative to that supreme point at which "you can hardly say whether the lines give grandeur to the drama, or whether it is the drama which turns the words into poetry."²

Eliot is intensely concerned with the musical function of poetry in the drama. Since, in poetic drama, the poetry and the drama are mutually creative, each must be read in terms of the other. Eliot conceives the poetry in verse drama as "a kind of musical design... which reinforces and is at one with the dramatic movement."³ The essential inter-relationship between drama and poetry is, for Eliot, the organic synthesis of a simultaneous design in action and in music. It has, indeed, an affinity with the ballet which he admires for its "immediate and direct"⁴ effect, and for its concern with "a permanent form,"⁵ but which

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1. 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry,' p.52.
 2. 'The Poetry of W.B. Yeats,' Purpose, July/Dec. 1940.
 3. 'Poetry and Drama,' p.73.
 4. 'The Duchess of Malfi at the Lyric'.
 5. 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry,' p.47.

he rejects for its ephemeral content. Like Masfield, he conceives the poet dramatist as a "musician," "mentally singing his story to the end,"¹ The poetic play is carried out simultaneously in terms of action, and "in terms of verse,"² for to work out a play in verse is to be working like a musician as well as like a prose dramatist; it is to see the whole thing as a musical pattern. And this is an entirely different thing from a play set to music. It is not like an opera, but some musical form like the sonata or fugue."³ The "musical pattern" which is at one with the dramatic pattern of the play, "intensifies our excitement by reinforcing it with feelings from a deeper and less articulate level,"⁴ by dramatising the eddies of those "feelings and emotions which we can only see, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye."⁵ For a full appreciation of poetic drama, the audience must inter-translate the formal aspects of

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1. J. Masfield, So Long To Learn, 1952, p.94.
 2. 'The Need for Poetic Drama,' p.994.
 3. op.cit.
 4. op.cit.
 5. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama,' (Adam), p.15.

the governing conception, and, with regard to the language of the verse play must "try to grasp the whole design; and read character and plot in the understanding of this subterrene and submarine music."¹ Nor does the music of poetic drama effect the audience only at the level of full orchestration which accompanies the moments of greater intensity in the dramatic situation. Eliot stresses the importance of the subtle, subconscious musical design, the "transparent"² lines of verse in which the rhythm has "its effect upon the hearers, without their being conscious of it,"³ and evolves an unobtrusive musical pattern which "has checked and accelerated the pulse of our emotions without our knowing it."⁴

In the Preface to the edition of his Collected Plays published in 1925, Drinkwater wrote "In the days when verse was the natural speech of the theatre, its beauty, like the beauty of all fine style, reached the audience without any insistence upon itself. The guiding principle of the speech of these plays later than X = 0 has

1. Preface to The Wheel of Fire, p.XVIII.

2. 'Poetry and Drama,' p.71.

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit., p.73.

been, so far as I could manage it, to make it beautiful without letting anybody know about it."¹ Drinkwater, like Eliot, realised the playwright's obligation to the terms imposed by his age, to the necessity of working on the emotions of an audience unfamiliar with and therefore unsympathetic to poetic drama, "without their being conscious of it."² Each of the two dramatists approaches this problem from opposite directions. Drinkwater, after the pioneer work in the verse drama of his early lyrical plays, turns to the prose drama, attempting to reach the lowest common denominator between the two by infusing with "the sparest prose idiom something of the enthusiasm and poignancy of verse."³ Eliot, on the other hand, believes that the form most suited to the requirements of the twentieth century is to be evolved through a modification of the verse medium to the point at which "everything can be said in verse,"⁴ a modification to a form "in which dramatic characters can express the purest poetry without highfalutin and in which they can convey the most commonplace message

1. J. Drinkwater, Preface to Collected Plays, 1925, Vol.I, p.VIII.

2. 'Poetry and Drama,' p.71.

3. Preface to Collected Plays, p.VIII.

4. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.12.

without absurdity."¹ It is Eliot's view that "we should aim at a form of verse in which everything can be said that has to be said,"² a form "able to say homely things without bathos, as well as to take the highest flights without sounding exaggerated,"³ for "if the poetic drama is to reconquer its place, it must show that it can do just those things that are supposed to be done better in prose."⁴ Only by divesting the verse medium of artificiality, and by making it capable of the most ordinary exchanges of speech, can we hope to convince an age nurtured on prose drama that poetry is the natural medium for a play.

This possibility of subtlety influencing an audience inevitably suspicious of something with which they are unfamiliar is the great advantage which Eliot sees in the "naturalised" poetic drama. By creating a dramatic verse capable of everything from stage direction to spiritual revelation, the dramatist is able to lead a timid audience gently on towards the poetry which, were it offered in cold blood, they would self-

1. T.S.Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry,' Selected Prose, p.66.

2. 'Poetry and Drama,' p.70.

3. op.cit.

4. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.12.

consciously reject. The whole of a poetic play "will not be 'poetry' all the time",¹ for "the best part of life consists of prosaic passages."² However, unless the audience is, as were the Elizabethans, accustomed to poetry in the theatre and therefore ready to accept it quite naturally, a "mixture of prose and verse in the same play is generally to be avoided: each transition makes the auditor aware, with a jolt, of the medium."³ On the other hand, if the whole play is written in a verse which, at the lower level of intensity, is barely perceptible, the audience, its interest held by the dramatic action, and therefore not "wholly conscious"⁴ of the **muted** medium, moves on unconsciously to that moment "when the dramatic situation has reached such a point of intensity that poetry becomes the natural utterance, because then it is the only language in which the emotions can be expressed at all."⁵ It is at such "intense moments", when the

1. 'Poetry and Drama,' p.70.

2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' (N.Y.H.T.), p.2., col.1.

3. 'Poetry and Drama', p.69.

4. op.cit., p.68.

5. op.cit., p.70.

audience has become suddenly "aware"¹ of the poetry into which the dramatist has moved by an "imperceptible"² transition, that the function of "first-rate verse drama"³ is fulfilled. The audience, "intent upon the play"⁴ to a point beyond self-consciousness, without realizing it, is carried forward by the spiritual motion of the drama beyond the limits of everyday understanding, until it seems to them "that the dramatic situation had reached such a point of intensity that it was natural for the characters to express themselves in poetry,"⁵ that indeed "there are moments in life when poetry is the natural form of expression of ordinary men and women."⁶ So smooth is the aural transition between "verse" and "poetry", that the reaction of the audience is purely and instantaneously spiritual - "the actors are speaking in the same rhythms, with the same vocabulary, as before, and the change is felt, not in ~~the~~ awareness of versification

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1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.13.
 2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (N.Y.H.T.), p.2., col.1.
 3. op.cit.
 4. 'Poetry and Drama', p.68.
 5. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.13.
 6. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' (N.Y.H.T.), p.2., col.1.

but in ~~the~~ awareness of the higher or lower charge or energy in the whole scene."¹ By effecting this spiritual acquiescence quite naturally the verse drama fulfils its most noble function. The poet dramatist has not allowed his audience to feel obliged "to put itself in a special frame of mind to listen to the poetry,"² has not confused them by mingling his medium and demanding at certain points that they "change their attention and try to listen to poetry,"³ but has unobtrusively drawn them on to that supreme moment of spiritual awakening when they realise in astonishment and joy that "I could talk in poetry too!"⁴

At this moment of strength, however, Eliot ~~is~~ reveals the greatest weakness in his critical theory. All art is indeed illusion. That moment at which we feel that "ordinary men and women" could "talk in poetry too" is the moment of supreme illusion, the "fine and noble lie"⁵ by which we believe, for the instant, that we are "the masters of our existence."⁶ We would question

1. op.cit.

2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.13.

3. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party,' p 22.

4. 'Poetry and Drama', p.79.

5. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.271.

6. See L. Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy, A Critical Study, p.18.

Eliot's statement that this magnificent spiritual modification is effected solely because "the dramatic situation" has reached an extraordinary "point of intensity" which has its consequences in a particularly high charge of emotion, an emotion which "may be supposed" to "lift" the character in the play "from his ordinary discourse, until the audience feels not that the actors are speaking verse but that the characters in the play have been lifted into poetry."¹ It seems probable that Eliot implies, by the term "poetry", that state of spiritual intensification which is generated by great poetic drama. Nevertheless, the critic is to be condemned for what is a virtual refutation of character as an aspect of concept in the genuine poetic play. It brings suspicion on the general descriptive nature of Eliot's observations on the essentially generic human content of the true verse play. It accounts for a tentative uncertainty in his attitude to the characters in Shakespeare, for his difficulty in divining why certain lines which "might seem purely poetic"² yet "fit in with the character; or else we are compelled to adjust our conception of the character

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (N.Y.H.T.), p.2., col.1.

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.80.

in such a way that the lines will be appropriate to it."¹ It explains his divorcement of the greatest poetic lines from what we conceive to be inherently great poetic character, and his use of the phrase "beyond character",² not in the sense beyond or super human, but in the more restricted sense of 'out of character'. Above all, it rejects the initial conceptual intensification of character in poetic drama, and, in doing so, casts a shadow on the complete integrity of Eliot's comprehension of the genesis of art.

Nevertheless, we may not question the integrity and insight of Eliot's demand for a "form of versification and an idiom which would serve all my purposes, without recourse to prose, and be capable of unbroken transition between the most intense speech and the most relaxed dialogue."³ It illustrates at once the soundness of an abstract aesthetic theory which conceives genuine poetic drama as a flexible, living medium organically related to actual existence, and the sincerity of the pioneer facing ~~up~~ ~~to~~ the challenge of an age unfamiliar

1. op.cit., p.81.

2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.15.

3. 'Poetry and Drama', p.83.

with and consequently unsympathetic towards poetry in the theatre. Eliot's attitude to this problem is healthy; the acceptance of the fact that "we have to accustom our audiences to verse to the point at which they will cease to be conscious of it,"¹ rejects any tendency towards a potentially fatal artistic snobbery. It implies the need for that fundamental understanding between dramatist and auditor on which the hope of a 'traditional' form for contemporary poetic drama may be based.

Furthermore, Eliot's belief in the essential relationship between dramatic poetry and music² underlies an additional advantage which he sees in the use of muted, insinuating poetry at the more relaxed level of the verse-drama - the possibility of "verse rhythm" having "its effect upon the hearers, without their being conscious of it,"³ of evolving "subterrene and submarine music"⁴ which, we shall find, "has checked and accelerated the pulse of our emotions without our knowing it."⁵ Throughout his critical work, Eliot

1. op.cit., p.70.

2. See supra, pp.316-18.

3. 'Poetry and Drama', p.71.

4. Preface to The Wheel of Fire, p.XVIII.

5. 'Poetry and Drama', p.73.

reiterates this theory that the minds of the audience may be subtly influenced by the imperceptible penetration of verse rhythms in the same way in which the unobtrusive repetition of lightly shaped musical phrases and themes works unnoticed on an untrained ear at a concert performance. "The purpose of the verse" should be to operate on the auditor unconsciously so that he should think and feel in the rhythms imposed by the poet, without being aware of what these rhythms are doing.¹ The audience, put at their ease at the more prosaic level of the drama by a barely recognisable stylisation of everyday speech, are "able to forget that they are listening to a poetic play,"² and are raised gently by the grip of the dramatic situation and by "the exciting effect of verse rhythms operating on the mind of the listener without his being conscious of it,"³ to a level of spiritual acquiescence at which they will automatically accept the natural utterance of poetry in the inevitable swelling of the music into a

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1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (N.Y.H.T.), p.2., col.1.
 2. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', p 21
 3. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.15.

full rendering of the intensified theme. Living as we do in an age which must be subtly weaned back to the acceptance of poetry on the stage, we recognise the aesthetic honesty and the practical value of Eliot's theory that "the unconscious effect of verse on the audience is the most important part of its effect, and the best justification for its use."¹

In 1936 Eliot acknowledged the debt owed to W.B. Yeats for "the revival of poetic drama in our time."² Our own acknowledgement to the further debt owed to Eliot himself involves an inevitable comparison between the dramatic theories of the modern pioneers and between their methods of approach to the reinstatement of verse in the theatre. By virtue of this comparison we are enabled to evaluate more significantly the essentially practical and realistic approach of Eliot to the problems facing the dramatist of the present century.

In contrast to that of Eliot, Yeats' attitude is one of spiritual idealism approaching on spiritual martyrdom. For Yeats, who openly declared that he had rather that the Irish National Theatre failed than

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1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.13.
 2. 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.994.

surrendered, for the sake of popularity, the right to shelter "the capricious spirit that bloweth as it listeth",¹ there is no possibility of ~~translating~~^{integrating} the commercial and the arts theatre. His critical observations and aesthetic theory stem from a consistent imaginative integrity with a fine disregard for popular success. His dramatic theory is defiant, uncompromising and idealistic, a magnificent plea for the unrestricted rights of art, "shaking the dust of time from its feet",² and "compelled by nothing but its own capricious spirit that as yet sends its message from the foundations of the world."³ The readjustment necessary in order to bring back poetry into the theatre must be on the part of the audience's attitude to this form of art; art itself must never stoop to gather up the unfaithful.

Against this aristocratic artistic integrity we set Eliot's theory that poetic drama must reconquer its place by showing that it can perform ^{both} the more menial task of the prose drama and its own great spiritual function.⁴ We cannot, however, say that Eliot is

1. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.59.

2. op.cit., p.153.

3. op.cit., p.58.

4. cf. supra, pp319-20.

betraying his cause by seeking to further it even among the heretic. We must remember the different circumstances under which Yeats and Eliot wrote. Yeats had the undeniable advantage of addressing a people credulous and imaginative, a people not so far removed from those "who believe so much in the soul, and so little in anything else, that they were never entirely conscious that the earth was solid under the foot-sole."¹ He could afford the direct attempt to recall his audience to their inherent love of extravagant lyricism and imaginative fable. Eliot, however, is faced with the Geraldts, the Violets, and the Gunnings of this world, the people who regard the theatre as nothing more than after-dinner entertainment, who aggressively "do not like poetry".² He is too staunch a pioneer in the verse drama to resign himself, with the air of a martyr, to the limitations of the coterie, so often charged with that "highbrow effect which is so depressing".³ He champions the rights of verse drama on the very ground held by the opposition. A genuine pioneer must modify

1. Plays and Controversies, p.123.

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.74.

3. T.S. Eliot, 'Euripides and Professor Murray', Selected Essays, p.50.

the methods by which he achieves his aim to the circumstances under which he labours. If Yeats gave poetry rebirth, it is Eliot who has adapted it to its environment.

Implicit in Eliot's theory that the immediate future of poetic drama lies in its 'naturalisation' to the point at which, at the lower level of intensity, it may be capable of the function of prose, is his belief in the essential organic relationship between the language of genuine poetic drama and living speech. The failure to realise the significance of this relationship, that "there is a great difference between making your characters talk in verse, and merely making them recite poetry",¹ was, as Eliot himself points out, the downfall of the 19th century dramatists. What "makes these plays so lifeless" is not a fault in plot, action or characterisation, "it is primarily that their rhythm of speech is something that we cannot associate with any human being except a poetry reciter."² As Abercrombie so significantly remarks, poetry "is not made out of

1. 'The Need for Poetic Drama', p.995.

2. 'The music of Poetry' Selected Prose, pp.61-62.

printed words, but out of spoken words;"¹ and in dramatic poetry, Eliot notes, "the dependence of verse upon speech is much more direct --- than in any other."² If poetic drama is not to be wooden and bloodless, the dramatist must suggest conversation, and "to suggest conversation, you must suggest the conversation of your own age, not that of some great predecessor generations ago."³ It was the realisation of this truth which moved Yeats to send Synge off to the west of Ireland where he could shape his poetry from the living poetry in the speech of the peasant - "for there everything is old and everything alive and nothing is common or threadbare."⁴ Here the dramatic theory of Eliot and of Yeats is allied in the perceptive truth that "we must found good literature on living speech."⁵ Art which is to have true life and genuine significance is created by the poet's subjugation of disordered actuality to the spiritual reality of his own imaginative conception. The utterance of contemporary poetic drama must be founded on the utterance of contemporary human beings; the

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1. L. Abercrombie, 'Poetry and Contemporary Speech', The English Association, Pamphlet No.27, Feb.1914,p.7.
 2. 'The music of Poetry', pp.60-61.
 3. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam), p.11.
 4. Plays and Controversies, p.30.
 5. op.cit., p.29.

founding of modern dramatic speech on the dramatist's reading in the great literature of the past can only lead, at best, to a "literary exercise" which, "however lovely",¹ is yet "an evasion of the immediate task"² of satisfying the needs of our own time.

Yeats, for whom "without fine words there is no literature",³ rejected with a martyr's anguish, the superficialities and banalities of modern social intercourse. His belief that true contemporary dramatic form is born, not of literature, but of life, is no less strong than that of Eliot, but for him such a form is useless unless it be made thrilling with "abundant, resonant, beautiful, laughing, living speech",⁴ of which the "vivid, picturesque, ever-varied language of Mr. Synge's persons"⁵ is a supreme example. In advising Synge to create a living verse drama by imposing artistic form on the "English idiom of the Irish-thinking people of the west",⁶ Yeats turned from the bald, unfertile

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1. T.S. Eliot, "Review of Cinnamon and Angelica by Middleton Murray", Athenaeum, May 14, 1920.
 2. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' (N.Y.H.T.) p.1, col.3.
 3. Plays and Controversies, p.174.
 4. W.B. Yeats, The Cutting of an Agate, p.115.
 5. Plays and Controversies, p.120.
 6. op.cit., p.23.

speech of present day society to the past; a past not, however, congealed in the printed word, but vibrant in the living utterance of a people unspoilt by contact with modern civilisation. His dramatic theory assumes this living poetry, and demands therefore, a bold, rich utterance for verse drama, a dramatic poetry swinging its "silver hammer"¹ of "joyful, fantastic, extravagant, whimsical, beautiful, resonant, and altogether reckless"² speech against the "wooden images"³ of a trivial and artificial society.

It is with this very society, however, that Eliot's dramatic theory assumes a concern. His criticism is based on his own pioneering aims, on the possibility of a drama which shall find a means of expression for yet another "dumb class"⁴ in society, the people whose spiritual stirrings are smothered under the impersonal viciousness of modern 'civilised' living. It was Yeats who said "If you would enoble the man of the roads you

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1. op.cit., p.62.
 2. op.cit., p.123.
 3. op.cit., p.62.
 4. op.cit., p.206.

must write about the roads, or about the people of romance, or about great historical people."¹ For Eliot, writing for an audience with none of the inherent Irish respect for romantic and historical fable, an audience which is, indeed, inclined to regard them as nothing more than a pleasing spectacle, confinement of poetic drama to the two last is but an evasion of the immediate problem. The critic demands a direct approach to the needs of his time; if you would enable the man with a telephone you must write about telephones. Poetry must not depend upon the poet's creation of "some imaginary world totally unlike our own" in which it may be "tolerated".² We must find an essential imaginative relationship between the actual and the spiritually real of the artist. "What we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre ... Then we should not be transported into an artificial world: on the contrary, our own sordid, dreary daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured."³ If poetry is

1. op.cit., p.32.

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.79.

3. op.cit.

to reinstate itself it must face its difficulties, and not take refuge in pretty costume and charming but trivial sentiment; "it has got to show that it can deal with what appears to be the most refractory material",¹ to tackle "a plot of contemporary people such as the men and women we know,"² people "dressed like ourselves, living in houses and apartments like ours, and using telephones and motor cars and radio sets",³ and involved in "the same perplexities, conflicts and misunderstandings that we and our acquaintances get involved in."⁴ A living drama must find its origin in life.

In taking up the cause of his own generation, Eliot therefore imposed upon his art the problem of a verse form to be evolved from a comparatively colourless contemporary speech. The "living speech"⁵ with which he voluntarily concerns himself is the language heard today in buses, shops, restaurants and hairdressing establishments. If poetic drama is to meet the needs of

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (N.Y.H.T.) p.1, col.3.

2. op.cit.

3. 'Poetry and Drama', p.79.

4. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (N.Y.H.T.) p.1, col.3.

5. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.29.

people who look as we do and who are faced with our problems, it must express itself in a language based on the speech which we normally employ. Throughout his critical work, Eliot reiterates the need for a new form of dramatic poetry which shall come naturally from the lips of the contemporary dramatic personages newly accepted by the verse play. This new form must be "devised out of colloquial speech",¹ and the rhythms which it employs must be a modification of the underlying rhythms of our everyday speech.

It is this ever present awareness of contemporary needs which motivates Eliot's demand for a pruning of superfluous lyricism in the drama. The lyricism of Shakespeare was the supreme limit to which a playwright may push a living dramatic form. In his later plays Shakespeare reached the most noble heights of the verse play, a dramatic poetry elaborate, rich, extravagant, and yet organically related to a living form of expression. However, as Eliot points out, lyrical extravagance for its own sake, however beautiful, will, without this organic relationship to living speech, become a magnificent superfluity, a clog on the movement of the drama resulting in the lifeless effect illustrated by

1. Intro. to Savanorola, p.XI.

the 19th century poetic play. In the present age, which has not yet succeeded in fusing actual existence and dramatic art, the movement forward must be preceded by a movement backward, a clearing away of the past to make room for the future. "The course of improvement is towards a greater and greater starkness".¹ There must be a cutting away "however painful" of the "luxury" of the "beautiful line for its own sake".² Until the poet "trying to write for the theatre" in an age which offers no formal tradition in which to work, has mastered "the understanding of theatrical technique", he must undergo "a long period of disciplining his poetry, and putting it, so to speak, on a very thin diet in order to adapt it to the needs of the stage".³ It is only when, "by a gradual purging of poetical ornament",⁴ the way has been made clear for the creation of that "donnée"⁵ craved by the twentieth century, a new dramatic form, that we may presume to elaborate on the basic pattern, "to make more

1. 'The Poetry of W.B. Yeats', Purpose, July/Dec.1940.

2. op.cit.

3. 'Poetry and Drama', p.84.

4. 'The Poetry of W.B. Yeats'.

5. 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', p.443.

liberal use of poetry and take greater liberties with ordinary colloquial speech."¹

This essentially pioneering spirit modifies Eliot's own dramatic extravagances. His tendency towards the promulgation of the "thorough-going convention, a ritual" for which he feels an inherent "craving",² is tempered by the knowledge that before a man can fly, he must learn to walk. In practice, he illustrates this by his self-compelled³ movement away from the highly liturgical choral tempo of The Rock and murder in the Cathedral to the comparative austerity of the muted stylisation of the later plays. In dramatic theory he rejects the very devices used in the performance of his first experiment in the verse drama;⁴ we cannot overcome the unconscious conflict between "creator and interpreter"⁵ and satisfy the dramatist's demands for a gesture which will "symbolise" rather than "express"⁶ emotion by effecting "the utter rout of the actor profession". --- Occasionally attempts have been made to 'get around' the actor, to envelop him in masks, to set up a few

1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.84.

2. T.S.Eliot, 'Dramatis Personae', Criterion, I, 3., April 1923, pp.303-6.

3. 'Poetry and Drama', p.79.

4. Sweeney Agonistes, in which all the characters but Sweeney himself were masked.

5. 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', p.446.

6. 'Dramatis Personae', Criterion I, 3, April 1923, pp.303-6.

'conventions' for him to stumble over, or even to develop little breeds of actors for some special Art drama. This meddling with nature seldom succeeds; nature usually overcomes these obstacles."¹ Here Eliot almost brutally refutes that section of Yeats' dramatic criticism which relates, not to the general aims of the Irish Dramatic movement, but to that experimental period which culminated, in practice, in the mystic symbolism of his Plays for Dancers.² For Eliot, an intensely practical reformer, these plays "do not solve any problem for the dramatist in verse."³ Yeats' exploration of the possibilities of substituting character and action with masked figures and rhythmic, symbolic movement expressive of pure spiritual motion, is but a beautiful evasion of the modern dramatist's problem - a problem which Yeats himself keenly examined in his later plays. Eliot is, as he himself said of Murray, "too keenly aware of his precise place in time",⁴ of his obligation to the requirements of his age, to seek spiritual refuge in

1. 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', p.447.

2. W.B. Yeats, Four Plays for Dancers, 1921, Collected Plays, 1952.

3. 'Poetry and Drama', p.75.

4. 'Revue of Cinnamon and Angelica'.

"an unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many."¹

This keen awareness of "his precise place in time", of the need to adapt the verse drama to the demands of contemporary living, underlies the refreshing absence of sentimental awe in Eliot's attitude towards the religious play. He sweeps aside outdated prejudices and supports the possibility of a living religious drama in the face of an age which, with false delicacy, reproduces the medieval religious play as "a very pretty piece of pageantry, at the expense of the essential emotion of religious drama or of any drama,"² and which attends a religious dramatic performance in the spirit of self-conscious righteousness in which it patronises a "jumble sale".³ In the first place he demands a healthy approach to the production of the religious drama of the past, an attempt to recapture its essential spiritual significance, and not to be content with "a faint revival" of its imaginative conception, or to timidly "avoid direct emotion".⁴ More significantly, he insists that

1. Plays and Controversies, p.212.

2. 'Religious Drama: medieval and modern', p.9.

3. op.cit., p.8.

4. op.cit., p.9.

we should try "to do something for our time that these plays did for theirs".¹ Only then can we hope to "recover the right attitude towards these old plays",² for - "if we cease to make we cease" both "to understand",³ and to meet the dramatic needs of the age in which we live. No less than the secular, the religious drama must recover its integrity by entering into a sincere organic relationship with actual existence, whatever the cost to that unhealthy aura of superstitious and false respect with which we tend to regard it - "if we want a living religious drama we must be prepared to accept something less sedative, and perhaps something which may cause us some discomfort and embarrassment in the process of getting used to it."⁴ Here Eliot recalls the outcry of Jones against a drama "diverted and hopelessly cut off from the main current of modern intellectual life".⁵ He reasserts the need for the religious play which finds its origin in contemporary living and which is consequently

1. op.cit., p.10.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit., p.8.

4. op.cit., p.9.

5. H.A. Jones, 'Religion and the Stage', appendix, Saints and Sinners, 1891, p.120.

competent to deal with the requirements of our own time.

Above all, Eliot realises that the re-establishment of a living religious drama involves "a kind of reintegration"¹ of secular and religious interest in the play. "I would go so far as to say that a religious play, to be good, must not be purely religious. If it is, ^{it is} simply doing something that liturgy does better, and the religious play is not a substitute for liturgical observance and ceremonial, but something different. It is a combination of religious with ordinary dramatic interest."² If the religious drama is to have a serious influence on our spiritual awareness, it must satisfy our desire for "human realities"³ and provide us with the human interest which we inevitably require of the play. We ask a human drama "related to the divine drama, but not the same", whereby as "spectators" rather than "participitants"⁴ we may witness the "taking up" of the "human" into "the divine".⁵ For Eliot, the need for religion is implicit in our desire for a serious drama,

1. 'Religious Drama', *Medieval and Modern*, p.13.

2. op.cit., p.10.

3. 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', p.49.

4. op.cit.

5. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (Adam) p.12.

for "so far as the stage in general has ever been serious, it has always dealt with moral problems, with problems which in the end required a religious solution - whether this necessity was present to the mind of the author or not".¹ Since "this essentially religious craving is latent in all serious lovers of the drama",² we "want the whole of serious drama to have a religious background and to be informed on religious principles."³ To achieve this we must not conceive "the creation of a living religious drama in our time --- as a problem entirely isolated from that of the secular theatre".⁴ The religious play must present spiritual reality, not through the purely divine symbolism of the Mass, but through "some liturgy less divine"⁵ whereby the motion of the spirit is related to the ordinary course of living.

The "reintegration of both kinds of drama", secular and religious, "must reflect the sincerity of our effort towards a "reintegration of life".⁶ Both in our

1. 'Religious Drama: Medieval and Modern', p.11.

2. op.cit., p.12.

3. op.cit., p.11.

4. op.cit., p.10.

5. 'A Dialogue on Drama Poetry', p.49.

6. 'Religious Drama': Medieval and Modern', p.13.

living and in our art we must reconcile human and spiritual desires. The "compartmentation of life in general", the "sharp division between our religious and our ordinary life"¹ should be overcome; we must reject our unhealthy conception of "human life as being about six-sevenths secular and one-seventh sacred", of religion "as an affair of Sundays, and parsons, and churches and chapels".² We should strive for mutual creativeness between a full religious life and a living religious drama portraying with integrity the essential fusion of humanity's ordinary and spiritual consciousness, and claiming its artistic right to comprehend "the whole of the nature, and heart, and passion, and conduct of man".³ The "artificial distinction" between the secular and the religious play must be "dissipated",⁴ and the careful preservation of "two attitudes, one for cathedral drama and the other for the West End"⁵ must end in the rebirth of a religious drama organically related to our everyday living.

1. op.cit.

2. H.A.Jones 'Religion and the Stage', p.125.

3. op.cit., p.141.

4. 'Religious Drama: Medieval and Modern', p.14.

5. op.cit.

It is this comprehension of the essential relationship between living art and actual existence which gives integrity to Eliot's work both as an ~~abstract aesthete~~ ^{critical theorist} and as a dramatic pioneer. We cannot deny the critic the formation, or at least the implication, of an abstract aesthetic theory. If, on occasion, his commentator must resort to forming a synthesis ~~of~~ ^{from} fragmentary criticism, Eliot's main critical dictates are based on a sincere comprehension of the genesis of the poet dramatist's art. His criticism reaches beyond the expository and interpretive to the fundamental creative process, and to the artistic relationship between imaginative conception and ultimate form.

His work as a pioneer can scarcely be overrated. In theory, as in practice, Eliot is led constantly by the consciousness of his quest for a form which may meet the demands of the twentieth century. He meticulously traces his own development, not as an individual artist, but as spokesman and champion of his age. His critical theory reveals a consistent awareness of himself in relationship to the struggle to re-establish poetry as a natural medium in the theatre. He is acutely conscious, not only of the end in view, but of the means whereby that end may be reached.

CHAPTER V

ELIOT'S DRAMA.

The Work of T.S.Eliot. Some of its Effects

The impact of T.S.Eliot on the English drama of his time is tremendous. We have related Eliot to his immediate predecessors in the English theatre on the grounds that both they and he are fired with the general pioneering spirit animating the drama of this century, but pointing out at the same time that Eliot's work is very much more in the spirit than in the letter of his English heritage.¹ In fact, the stride taken by Eliot is gigantic, by far outstripping anything written in England in the three decades before his entry on the twentieth century dramatic scene. It must be remembered, in this connection, that Eliot came comparatively fresh upon a world in which he had not grown up.² Although English influence was stronger in New England than in most parts of America, there Eliot was not directly exposed to the English dramatic environment. When Pound burst in upon the poetic scene Eliot had followed his

1. See Chap. IV, pp. 87-89

2. Born in St.Louis in 1888. Eliot came to England in 1914.

lead, and Eliot's later poetic drama is a transmutation of the imaginative impulse behind this poetry.¹ E. Martin Browne points out² that, when he was first introduced to Eliot in connection with the proposed play for the forty-five churches fund,³ the poet was very much more concerned with classical drama and with the achievements of Pound than with the current discussion on Bottomley's play for the Exeter festival.⁴ Eliot had something new to impart to an English drama which recognised its own need but was unable to give it satisfaction.

The significance of Eliot in relationship to the drama which comes after him is not primarily to be evaluated by a minute examination of every slight adaptation of and variation on his original thought and technique. The conduct of such an examination would be merely to observe the ever widening ripples without first gauging the force of the initial disturbance. It is, then, not so important that we trace the direct influence of Eliot's style on specific poetic plays, as that we

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1. See Chap. II.
 2. This remark was made during a personal interview with Mr. Martin Browne.
 3. The Rock, 1934.
 4. The Acts of St. Peter, 1933.

estimate to what extent and in what ways the coming of Eliot effected a change in the outlook of the English dramatist in this century. What we are seeking is the essential difference between the English drama written before Eliot's arrival, and that written after it.

In brief, Eliot's gift to his age is the reinstatement in the theatre of a poetic drama which recognises and respects itself as a living force organically related to contemporary living. From the very beginning of his dramatic career, the poet faced up to the problem formulated in one of his more recent critical discourses - "if the poetic drama is to reconquer its place, it must, in my opinion, enter into overt competition with prose drama".¹ In this single statement is implied the salvation of the contemporary English stage. Here at last is an unflinching acknowledgement of the major difficulties confronting the genuine contemporary poet dramatist. For the success with which the serious prose dramatists after Ibsen established the naturalistic play in the theatre presents the modern writer of verse drama with a formidable challenge. The contemporary world and contemporary problems have been brought to the stage, and the poet must

1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.79.

receive them into his imaginative comprehension and treat what may seem to be the most refractory material in the spirit and language of poetry. He cannot afford to retire into the limbo of "some imaginary world totally unlike it, (the audience's), own, an unreal world in which poetry is tolerated"¹ and in which "personages ~~od~~ressed in the fashion of some distant age"² declaim an artificial language completely dislocated from everyday speech. Prose drama has brought the modern poet dramatist face to face with "people dressed like ourselves, living in houses and apartments like ours, and using telephones and motor cars and radio sets",³ and the poetic drama must meet its obligation to ~~the~~s actual existence - "what we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre".⁴ Only then shall we have a verse drama which may claim to be genuinely contemporary, in that it transforms living fact into imaginative experience, - "then we should ^{not} be transported into an artificial world; on the contrary,

1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.79.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit.

our own sordid, dreary daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured."¹

There are two chief ways in which Eliot enters "into overt competition with prose drama".² In his earlier work, The Rock and Murder in the Cathedral, he evaluates uncontemporary material in terms of contemporary experience. Historical fact is imaginatively intensified to timeless significance, and the poet brings "home to the audience the contemporary relevance of the situation".³ This is one way of facing up to a prose drama which, while for the most part confining itself to the narrow limitations of the social and topical, presents an illusion of everyday existence, and it is a way taken by many of the poet dramatists after Eliot. We can scarcely overestimate the importance of these early plays of Eliot in the evolution of the now sizeable body of poetic drama in which the Bible, legend, historical and classical themes are rendered in terms of present day life, psychology and language. A debt to this initial impetus is clearly acknowledged in the work of Fry, Williams, Ridler, Nicholson and Duncan.

1. op.cit.

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.79.

3. op.cit., p.77.

The second method by which Eliot deals with the problem posed by the naturalistic drama is more audaciously direct. In Sweeney Agonistes, and in his three most recent plays, Eliot has attempted to bring what has become generally accepted as the world of prose drama within the scope of the poetic imagination. In doing so, he has tackled the root of the troubles which beset the verse dramatist today, and, of these, language has inevitably proved to be the greatest difficulty. The serious prose drama of the early years of this century dealt with the social and ethical problems of its time, and this realistic matter demanded not only an illusion of everyday life, but also of everyday language. Thus, then, contemporary existence was first brought into the twentieth century theatre in company with an essentially prosaic utterance, and audiences have come to consider this combination inevitable. Since poetry is not natural on the lips of characters in the realistic play, there has arisen an erroneous suspicion that it is unnatural on the stage. The poetic drama has only itself to blame. In the nineteenth century poet dramatists allowed their work to lose contact with actual existence,¹ and the serious prose drama was

1. See Chap.I, pp.2-3.

the result of a violent reaction against art which was culpably remote from life itself. Unfortunately, prose drama which was too narrowly concerned with the surface of this actual living was allowed to establish its conventions firmly in the minds of the theatre-going public before the verse drama realised the dangers to which it was exposed - indeed, complete annihilation seemed imminent - and made a serious attempt to adjust itself to the contemporary situation. No finer effort has been made in this direction than Eliot's genuinely 'modern' verse plays, but his work is not without the scars of what was necessarily to prove a bitter struggle. An illusion of everyday speech has become so familiar in any play in a modern setting that the best the poet can hope to do is to introduce a poetry so unobtrusive that the ill-founded suspicions of the audience are not aroused. Eliot realised this significant truth and he has gone far in rehabilitating poetry in the theatre. Nevertheless, his poetry has suffered from the enforced severity of its "thin diet"¹ and his spontaneous artistic development has doubtless been curbed by his awareness of his obligations as a dramatic pioneer.

1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.84.

In one of his earliest critical writings,¹ Eliot suggested that "possibly the majority of attempts to confect a poetic drama have begun at the wrong end; they have aimed at the small public which wants 'poetry' --- our problem should be to take a form of entertainment, and subject it to the process which would leave it a form of art. Perhaps the music hall comedian is the best material."² Indeed, Eliot himself attempts a practical application of this theory in his own Sweeney Agonistes,³ but it is not primarily to Eliot's work that one unhesitatingly refers a critical statement which might well have been the formula for the collaborations of W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. Auden's The Dance of Death⁴ was published a year before the production of The Rock, but here, any possible influence from Eliot refers back to Sweeney Agonistes, and it is significant to note that, although Auden's and Eliot's plays⁵ were first produced together in a double bill at the

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1. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', Dial, Nov. 1920.
 2. op.cit., p.447.
 3. See Chap.III, pp.164-172.
 4. W.H. Auden, The Dance of Death, 1933.
 5. The Dance of Death and Sweeney Agonistes.

Westminster Theatre in 1935, Eliot's Fragments were first published in The Criterion almost ten years before that date.¹

The value of The Dance of Death is considerably less than that of Sweeney Agonistes. As in the later plays written in collaboration with Isherwood, Auden does not entirely succeed in subjecting the form which he adopts to the control of a strong imaginative unity. In Sweeney Agonistes the dramatic conflict is limited to a stark contrast between two levels of understanding, but, if the underlying concept is narrow, at least the ultimate form of the play is rigorously dictated by its requirements. In The Dance of Death, on the other hand, not only does the author seem unable to make up his mind as to whether he is chiefly concerned with social or spiritual decadence, but the outline of his governing theme is lost in a welter of irrelevant burlesque. For example, we may draw an obvious comparison between Eliot's crocodile isle² and Auden's coastal and rural utopias,³ a comparison which reveals that, whereas Eliot employs

¹ Oct. 1926 and Jan. 1927.

². Sweeney Agonistes, 'Fragment of an Agon'

³. The Dance of Death.

~~³. 'Fragment of an Agon'.~~

the theme of escapism as a pregnant symbol of all superficial existence in contrast to the terrible reality of "birth, and copulation, and death",¹ Auden allows the force of the idea to be dissipated through a tenuous series of topical satirical allusions in which the serious note of

He who would prove
The Primal love
Must leave behind
All love of his kind
And fly alone
To the Alone.²

is almost casually sounded.

The Dog Beneath the Skin,³ the first play written by Auden and Isherwood, is most interesting in its use of a popular "form of entertainment"⁴ as a dramatic framework. The 'drama' is in the form of a musical comedy packed with popular songs and choruses, jazz rhythms, caricature, pantomime technique⁵ and revue

1. 'Fragment of an Agon.'
2. The Dance of Death
3. W.H. Auden and C. Isherwood, The Dog Beneath the Skin, 1955.
4. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.447.
5. See particularly Act I, Sc.1, e.g. -
"A handsome lad, his only one,
Called Francis, who was to succeed him,
Would he were here! We badly need him."

sketches. Where Auden and Isherwood fail is in that, although they brilliantly exploit this "form of entertainment" for satirical purposes, they do not perfectly "subject it to the process which would leave it a form of art".¹ The Dog Beneath the Skin does not succeed in raising the externals of entertainment to the heights of genuine drama because its formal elements are not governed by a powerful dominating dramatic conception. The play is a revue, a hotch potch of topical and social satire in which countless aspects of contemporary existence are bitterly exposed. The bitterness of this exposure acknowledges the seriousness of purpose beneath the sparkle of wit, but moral is not necessarily dramatic integrity. Furthermore, the obvious delight which the writers take in their own sense of humour all too frequently results in that "desolating air of schoolboy brilliance"² which leads one to suspect that Auden and Isherwood wrote The Dog Beneath the Skin in very much the same way as Muir and Norden turn out their weekly radio programme "Take It From Here".

The surface outline of the Quest plot is not firmly traced at the level of deeper significance. The

1. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.447.

2. Review of The Dance of Death in The Times, October 2nd. 1935.

essential synonymy of the search for spiritual truth and for a better society is blurred by the playwrights' apparent inability to resist the pursuit of even the most trivial opportunity for specific social satire. Consequently, the positive affirmation of spiritual truth, instead of balancing the destructive force of the satire, is almost lost in a frequently superfluous onrush of verbal artillery. As in The Dance of Death, the serious element in the play is neither clearly conceived nor convincingly expressed, and the ultimate effect is all too often that of an implication of depth introduced to justify what is undeniably the brilliance of the satirical attack. We inevitably suspect an underlying significance about which the playwrights themselves are apparently not entirely certain. The play is shot through with varying notes of warning, - from the almost coy reminder of ever present death

Something is going to fall like rain
And it won't be flowers,¹

through the distinctly Eliot-like² suggestion of some

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1. The Dog Beneath the Skin, Chorus to Act I.
 2. The possibility of influence from Eliot's poetry, and in this connection particularly of 'The Waste Land', must not be overlooked.

imminent terrible self discovery,

When the green field comes off like a lid
Revealing what was much better hid,¹

to a tirade of reproach against the lack of the spirit of brotherhood in man, but these casually inserted ideas demand an imaginative synthesis which is not apparent. This confusion beneath the surface of the drama must be referred back to the initial conception. The dramatists have failed to work out their ideas clearly at the conceptual level of the play, and the result is that a poorly developed suggestion of some greater significance not clearly defined is superimposed upon the progress of dramatic event.

This fatal weakness in conception is especially noticeable in the choral section of the play. As Raymond Williams points out, the choruses are here "clearly intended to stabilise the many evaluations",³ and in fact, the superficial structure of The Dog Beneath the Skin refers us back to The Rock produced in the previous year. However, the comparison between Eliot's play and

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1. The Dog Beneath the Skin, Chorus to Act I.
 2. op.cit., Chorus to Act III, Sc.V.
 3. Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, 1954, p.250.

that of Auden and Isherwood only serves to emphasise the faults in the latter. In The Rock, a poetry truly dramatic traces simultaneously the action of the drama and the spiritual development inextricably interwoven with the progress of this action. In The Dog Beneath the Skin, spiritual awareness is not evolved from or resolved in dramatic event, but is in fact "sought by the direct imposition of comment rather than by growth from within the dramatic body".¹ The utterances of the choruses to this play is arbitrary, having no true dramatic dependence on the witnessed plot. Furthermore, not only is there scarcely any attempt to elicit positive significance from the play's satirical destruction of contemporary standards of value, but the choruses themselves are too much concerned with precociously witty expansion of the satirical theme, and their speeches are charged with the topical allusion of

Tourists to whom the Tudor cafes
Offer Bovril and buns upon Breton ware
With leather work as a sideline,²

and

1. op.cit., p.252.

2. The Dog Beneath the Skin, Chorus to Act I.

One satin slipper austerely arranged
 On an inky background of blackest velvet:
 A waxen sandboy in skiing kit
 Dumb and violet among vapour lamps.¹

Auden's and Isherwood's adaptation of a "form of entertainment"² did not result in a form of dramatic art.

In The Ascent of F6³ a more successful attempt is made to join the dramatic issue with deeper implication, and there is a sincere effort to create a myth capable of imaging exactly the underlying idea. Ransom's quest for "Virtue and Knowledge",⁴ the salvation of society, is rendered in more convincing dramatic terms than was that of Alan Norman,⁵ and the progress of outer and inner development is more closely related and less frequently distracted by extraneous satirical matter. In this play the topical presentation of a society in desperate need of redemption does not run riot over the dramatic concept, but is balanced and controlled by the positive values formulated in the progress of the ascent.

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1. op.cit., Chorus to Act III.
 2. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.447.
 3. W.H. Auden and C. Isherwood, The Ascent of F6, 1936.
 4. The Ascent of F6, Act I, Sc.1.
 5. The Dog Beneath the Skin.

The identification of the voice of society with a suburban household following the stages of Ransom's climb results in a genuine dramatic tension.

As in The Dog Beneath the Skin there is confusion between the various elements in the play. The force of the symbolic ascent of the mountain is diffused by the variety of interpretation which it is made to bear - political satire, social salvation, and the intensely personal issue of self discovery. We are asked to believe that there is an essential underlying unity, but we are uncomfortably conscious of the working out of different themes on different levels of conception. The play takes on the limited fascination of a jig saw puzzle and we grow weary of trying to piece together the whole into some significant interrelated design.

In this play there is a distinct echo of an imagery employed by Eliot in his early poetry, and particularly in Murder in the Cathedral which was produced in the year before the publication of The Ascent of F6. We may take, for example, the sudden terrors which assail the dramatists' suburbia -

Mrs A: I have received singular warnings:
In the eyes of the beggar I have experienced
the earthquake and the simoom.

Mr.A: Sitting in the crowded restaurant, I have
overheard the confabulations of weasels.¹

terrors which are smothered by an appeal to the security
of the familiar pleasure

Mrs.A: Our moments of exaltation have not been
extraordinary
But they have been real.

Mr.A: In the sea-side hotel, we experienced genuine
passion:

Mrs.A: Straying from the charabanc, under tremendous
beeches,
We were amazed at the profusion of bluebells
and the nameless birds
And the Ghost Train and the switchback did
not always disappoint.²

1. op.cit., Act I, Sc.1.
cf. "I have heard
Fluting in the night-time, fluting and owls,
have seen at noon
Scaly wings slanting over, huge and ridiculous,
I have tasted
The savour of putrid flesh in the spoon"
Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.II.
2. op.cit., Act II, Sc.III.
cf. "We have kept the feasts, heard the masses,
We have brewed beer and cyder,
Gathered wood against the winter,
Talked at the corner of the fire,
Talked at the corners of streets,
Talked not always in whispers,
Living and partly living.
Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.I.

These rhythms and images are familiar in Eliot's work, but in this play they are not charged with the originality and intensity of Eliot's underlying conception. Eliot employs images of fear to substantiate a positive spiritual resurgence; in the work of Auden and Isherwood we are referred back to a stale concept of a querulous dissatisfaction with the triviality of social intercourse, and the value of the idea imaged here is almost entirely negative. The lives of Mr and Mrs A are not modified by the dramatic event, and they remain throughout the play in a state of idiosyncratic consciousness of their own futility. Since there is no sign of their spiritual development from the opening cry of "give us something to live for"¹ to the closing appeal of "save, save, save, save",² we would apply to Ransom's sacrifice the salient question "but was the victory real?"³ We cannot here as in Murder in the Cathedral measure the value of the act of martyrdom from the growth of spiritual understanding within those who were its witnesses.

The worth of On The Frontier⁴ does not greatly exceed that of a smart political satire somewhat

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1. The Ascent of F6, Act I, Sc.I.
 2. op.cit., Act II, Sc.V.
 3. op.cit.
 4. W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, On The Frontier, 1938.

embarrassingly ennobled by an attempt to idealise a romance between two lovers on opposite sides of the frontier into a symbol of man's ultimately unconquerable spirit of brotherly love. In this play the satirical musical comedy is pruned to a commenting framework to the action, but the comic invention is notably inferior to that of The Dog Beneath the Skin, and not infrequently bitter humour sinks to bad taste and peevish protest. Furthermore the attempt to establish a positive evaluation of life through Eric and Anna reveals that tendency towards trite sentiment which is Auden's and Isherwood's greatest weakness. We are not impressed by the vague prophecy of "the lucky guarded future" in which

Others like us shall meet, the frontier gone,
And find the real world happy"¹

Auden and Isherwood certainly made a deliberate attack on the limitations of photographic naturalism, but "what they offered in its place, when the dust of the high jinks had cleared, was subject to limitations which, though different from those of orthodox naturalism, are equally fatal."² The work of these writers is topical rather than truly contemporary. They concern

1. On The Frontier, Act III, Sc.III.

2. R. Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, pp.255-6.

themselves with the surface of the twentieth century way of life at the expense of more serious and permanent experience, and their plays are inclined to be precociously 'up to date' in the manner of the newspaper and the latest revue. All too frequently, even while we admire the audacity of their experiments, we suspect their imaginative integrity, and condemn their indulgence in dramatic antics in an age anxiously seeking expression in dramatic art.

Stephen Spender's Trial of a Judge¹ was published in the same year as On the Frontier. Apart from the obvious but superficial comparison in the technique of the presentation of Spender's Black Troop Leader and Eliot's Knights² in Murder in the Cathedral there is little

1. S. Spender, Trial of a Judge, 1938.

2. Cf. Black Troop Leader: "Before I say anything else, I want to repudiate emphatically the suggestion that there is anything sinister or alarming about us." Trial of a Judge, Act IV.
with Third Knight: "But there is one thing I should like to say, and I might as well say it at once. It is this: in what we have done, and whatever you may think of it, we have been perfectly disinterested." Murder in the Cathedral, Pt. II.
(It is interesting, if of no great value, to note that Spender gives a stage directing for the "golfing stroke" used in at least one stage production of Murder in the Cathedral)

evidence of any direct influence from Eliot on this play. Nevertheless, as we have pointed out,¹ Eliot's impact on contemporary English drama is not primarily to be estimated from such evidence. The force of this impact is felt most keenly if we compare Spender's bold handling of contemporary subject matter with the admirable but comparatively timorous experiments of the English Poetic Movement² during the early years of this century. For Trial of a Judge is undeniably a bold experiment, however we may regard the ultimate achievement. The play fails because Spender does not entirely succeed in governing his political sympathies by his dramatic concept. Despite the analogy drawn between the Judge and Christ,³ what emerges most clearly from the play is not so much the idea of a spiritual truth which will ultimately prevail, as the implication that "man's release"⁴ lies in the adoption of the Communist cause. Furthermore, the poetry in the play has a distinct tendency to be declamatory rather than dramatic, and the total impression is one of chorus upon chorus exploiting the ethical significance of the action. Nevertheless Trial of a Judge is significant in the dramatic development of our time.

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1. See supra, p. 348.
 2. See Chap. I, pp. 53 ff.
 3. Trial of a Judge, Act III.
 4. op.cit., Act V.

Spender has made a genuine attempt to found a poetic drama in life itself.

Louis MacNeice's Out of the Picture,¹ a partly satirical, partly sentimental presentation of the thirties, is clearly in the Auden-Isherwood tradition. The action of the play is contained in a series of revue sketches, linked at the surface level by a fantastic narrative, and at what purports to be the depths by a somewhat trite conception of the eternal resurgence of life and hope in the face of imminent death -

As long as we keep the courage of our limbs
Our animal instincts and our human soul -²

The play makes no genuine dramatic evaluation of any enduring human reality, and, at best, evokes the mood of the months prior to the second World War with a pleasing nostalgia reminiscent of Brooke.

The Dark Tower³ written for radio almost ten years later, has a distinctly stronger claim to true poetic drama. Here MacNeice works out the idea of perpetual redemption in terms of a symbolic dramatic action, and the myth which he creates substantiates and

1. L. MacNeice, Out of the Picture, 1937.

2. Out of the Picture, Act II, Sc. II.

3. L. MacNeice, The Dark Tower, 1946.

replaces his underlying concept. The progress of dramatic event traces clearly the progress of the spiritual theme and the two aspects of the initial imaginative conception are mutually creative. The Dark Tower is not great, but it has dramatic integrity.

Of the poet dramatists writing after Eliot, Christopher Fry has undoubtedly proved to have the strongest appeal to the theatre-going public. This in itself is important, especially in the face of Eliot's deliberate campaign to free the verse play from the confines of the study and the "small public which wants 'poetry',"¹ and to equip it to meet the challenge of the commercial theatre on its own ground. Fry, like Eliot, exhorts the poetic dramatist of the century to cease lamenting that his work is "caviare to the general", and to spend his effort in creating in the general a taste for caviare. There is a fundamental sympathy in the outlook of these two dramatists, even though their respective approaches to the problem of poetic language are diametrically opposed. The basic motivation behind their pioneering efforts is a desire to rehabilitate poetry in the theatre as a living force capable of entering

1. 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.447.

"into overt competition with prose drama",¹ and their work is founded on a realisation that "poetry's only way into the theatre is by the stage-door".²

Although the paths of Eliot and Fry diverge on linguistic grounds, we acquiesce to Fry's acknowledgement of Eliot as his original master.³ The influence of Eliot on Fry's earliest play⁴ is obvious and direct, and it should be noted, moreover, that The Boy with a Cart is closely related to the later The Firstborn,⁵ Thor, with Angels,⁶ and A Sleep of Prisoners⁷ in that all are part of the movement, which received its initial impetus from Eliot's own religious drama, to found a living religious drama, in this century. Echoes of Murder in the Cathedral are clearly audible in The Boy with a Cart. The People of South England are obviously related to the Women of Canterbury, and,

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1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.79.
 2. C.Fry, 'When Poets Write Plays', New Theatre, Vol.4, No.9, March, 1948, p.17.
 3. According to E. Martin-Browne, this remark was made during a private conversation between Fry and himself.
 4. C. Fry, The Boy with a Cart, 1939.
 5. C. Fry, The Firstborn, 1946 (first version).
 6. C.Fry, Thor, with Angels, 1948.
 7. C. Fry, A Sleep of Prisoners, 1951.

although Fry, at the very beginning of his play, anticipates that a degree of spiritual understanding which in Eliot's drama was hard won from suffering, spiritual insight is organically related to dramatic event in that it is, partially at least,¹ confirmed by the action of the play. The curtain rises on The Boy with a Cart at the point at which it fell on Murder in the Cathedral. The first rapture of spiritual awakening has now mellowed to a calm, sustaining consciousness -

God providing, we dividing, sowing, and pruning;
 Not knowing yet and yet sometimes discerning:
 Discerning a little at Spring when the bud and shoot
 With pointing finger show the hand at the root,
 With stretching finger point the mood in the sky:
 Sky and root in joint action; -----

 We have felt the joint action of root and sky, of man
 And God, -----

----- before wheels have turned
 Or after they are still, we have discerned:
 Guessed at divinity working above the wind,
 Working under our feet; or at the end
 Of a furrow, watching the lark dissolve in sun,
 We have almost known, a little have known
 The work that is with our work, as we have seen
 The blackthorn hang where the Milky Way has been:
 Flower and star spattering the sky
 And the root touched by some divinity

----- We have felt the grip
 Of the hand on earth and sky in careful coupling
 Despite the jibbing, man destroying, denying
 Disputing, or the late frost looting the land
 Of green. Despite the flood and the lightning's rifle
 In root and sky we can discern the hand.²

1. See infra, pp. 371-3.

2. Opening chorus to The Boy with a Cart.

- a consciousness which finds nourishment in the manifestation of God's purpose in the works of nature and the heart of man.

The re-enaction of the story of Cuthbert is dramatised, both at the surface and at the depths, by choral commentary which encompasses within its range scenic description, continuity of time, and the intensification of underlying significance, and there is, moreover, a sincere attempt to relate this significance to present day living, to the experience of those who exist in the age of the "high-powered car" and the "unbalanced budget".¹ The great weakness of the play is the disproportion between its outer action and inner interpretation. The Boy with a Cart is essentially a comedy, vibrant with the exuberance of its hero, a joyful testament of youthful faith and enthusiasm. The weight of the choral commentary is greater than the light-hearted mood of the action can bear. The chorus elicits more from the progress of event than is spontaneously generated thereby - the intensity with which they brood, for example, on the amusing incidents between Cuthman and the Fipps family is almost ludicrous -

1. op.cit., final chorus.

and consequently their utterance tends to be pompous and top heavy, divorced from the prevailing tone of the play. Fry has mistakenly invested his reconstruction of the life of this cheerful saint of Sussex with a significance which Eliot evolved from the sterner stuff of martyrdom and the subjugation of spiritual pride.

For Fry, imaginative reality is an overwhelming sense of the fact of existence,¹ and tragedy is the dramatic substantiation of this fearful and wonderful truth, "the demonstration of the human dilemma".² In The Firstborn, the "human dilemma" is demonstrated through the experience of Moses, whom by a righteous act of liberation, perpetrates a force of evil which gets beyond his control and involves the life of Ramases whom he loves, and in whom he has placed his hope for the future. In this play, which is one of Fry's finest achievements, form and content are almost perfectly fused. The underlying question of the nature and meaning of existence is here implicit in the experience of the characters, and where it is explicit, as in Moses' overt inquiries, it is naturally and convincingly prompted by

1. C. Fry, 'The Contemporary Theatre', The Listener, February 23rd, 1950, pp.331-2.

2. op.cit., p.332.

the course of dramatic event. The strange and violent nature of this event results in spontaneous reflection on the mystery of being. Moses' agonised pursuit of human truth -

I am there, beyond myself, if I could reach
To where I am.¹

is, like Anath~~is~~'s -

We are born too inexplicably out
Of one night's pleasure, and have too little security:
No more than a beating heart to keep us probable,²

an involuntary outcome of the nexus of her character with the plot. Familiar standards are suddenly and terrible reversed -

Take evil by the tail
And you find you are holding good head-downwards,³

and the very essence of existence must be examined in order that it may be revalued.

The Firstborn is a healthy acknowledgement of the fresh life-blood which Eliot injected into modern religious drama. This translation of biblical narrative

1. The Firstborn, Act I, Sc.2.

2. op.cit., Act II, Sc.2.

3. op.cit., Act III, Sc.1.

into terms of permanent human experience is a far cry from the simple costumed Bible play, the "very pretty piece of pageantry" achieved "at the expense of the essential emotion of religious drama or any other drama."¹ Fry's transmutation of the story of the Israelites into the search for the meaning of contemporary and all life demonstrates the response of his contemporaries to Eliot's demand for an increasing freedom of treatment and a new urgency of thought.

It is this spirit of urgency which animates Thor, with Angels, performed two years later. In this play Fry is not, as, for example, was Drinkwater in A Man's House,² content merely to describe the effect of the new Christianity on the external lives of those who came in contact with it. Thor, with Angels explores the depths of religious experience in the soul of Cymen, forcing the audience to refocus an attention dulled by custom on the relationship between the Christian teachings and the principles of conduct among men. The basis of our ethical code is seen as though through fresh eyes, and our own truth is formulated in the utterance of a Jute living nearly two thousand years ago.

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Religious Drama. Medieval and Modern', p.9.

2. J. Drinkwater, A Man's House, 1934.

We are afraid
 To live by rule of God, which is forgiveness,
 Mercy, and compassion, fearing that by these
 We shall be ended. And yet if we could bear
 These three through dread and terror and terror's doubt,
 Daring to return good for evil without thought
 Of what will come, I cannot think
 We should be the losers.¹

A Sleep of Prisoners is one of the most audacious experiments in contemporary religious drama, and at the same time, is probably Fry's best play. Disappointing to those who searched it in vain for the exuberant eloquence of the comedies, this "more simple statement" of the dramatist's "vision"² of contemporary existence is a thing near perfectly dramatic, the ultimate form exactly imaging imaginative content. The play is a "complicated design" in which "each of four men", imprisoned in a church, is "seen through the sleeping thoughts of the others, and each in his own dream, speaks as at heart he is, not as he believes himself to be".³ As is not uncommon, the dreams of these men are impregnated with their thoughts just before sleep, and thus the recent quarrel between David and Peter, two of

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1. Thor, with Angels.
 2. Dedication to Robert Gittings of A Sleep of Prisoners.
 3. op.cit.

the prisoners, is re-enacted in terms of the biblical narrative which comes naturally into the minds of the sleepers, from their surroundings, and these Bible stories are, in turn, rendered in terms of present-day experience and language.

The struggle between good and evil is traced from the original sin of Adam and the initiation of death by Cain, through David's provocation by Peter's Absalom and the gentle Peter's imminent death at the hands of David's anguished Abraham, to the dream of Adams which changes gradually "to a state of thought entered into by all sleeping men, as though, sharing their prison life, they shared, for a few moments of the night, their sleeping life also".¹ In this dream the various levels of the drama merge, and the prisoners of war become prisoners to a bitter existence which offers no meaning, but from which they cannot escape -

Adams: Where are you going? Orders are
No man leaves unless in a state of death,²

- an existence which is simultaneously identified with

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1. Dedication to Robert Gittings of A Sleep of Prisoners.
 2. A Sleep of Prisoners.

the fiery furnace of the Old Testament. The coming of Meadow's as "Man" under the "command"¹ of God is a moment of redemption offering new hope.

Good has no fear;
 Good is itself, what ever comes.
 It grows, and makes, and bravely
 Persuades, beyond all tilt of wrong:
 Stronger than anger, wiser than strategy,
 Enough to subdue cities and men,
 If we believe it with a long courage of truth,²

and this note of hope is held beyond the awakening of the prisoners to the end of the play -

Adams: "Well, sleep, I suppose.

David: Yeh. God bless.

Peter: Rest you merry.

Meadows: Hope so. Hope so.³

Fry himself issues the manifesto of the spirit behind the writing of A Sleep of Prisoners, "the over-emphasis nowadays on being 'contemporary' is meaningless... the period (except in a strictly historical play) is merely the colour on the brush, the extra-illumination of the idea ... contemporary ... means 'Living'."⁴ In this

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

4. C.Fry, 'Poetry and the Theatre', Adam, International Review, 1951, p.8.

play, the barriers of time and place are broken down in the dramatist's imagination and incident as widely separated as man's first transgression and modern warfare is fused into a vision of human existence, a "precise statement of life which is at the same time a point of view, a world; a world which the author's mind has subjected to a process of simplification".¹ This "process of simplification", - the act of imaginative unification - impregnates the diverse material used in the presentation of the vision with living significance. A Sleep of Prisoners is a vision founded in life itself, in which the dilemma of the modern world is related to the eternal struggle of individual man against the forces of evil perpetrated by his own nature. The contemporary urgency of the situation is pointed by the presentation of uncontemporary material in terms of our own experience and our own language.² The freedom with which Fry handles biblical matter is a testimony to the increasing confidence of a modern religious drama which ^{has} begun to break down "the sharp division between our religious and our ordinary lives."³ We may take for

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.446.
 2. See supra, p.351
 3. T.S. Eliot, 'Religious Drama, Medieval and Modern', p.13.

example the revaluation of the fall of man in terms of present day language and experience -

Adams: Reporting for duty, sir.

Meadows: As you were Adam

Adams: No chance of that, sir.

Meadows: As you were, as you were.

Adams: Lost all track of it now, sir.

Meadows: How far back was it, Adam?

Adams: (with a jerk of the head). Down the road.
To dark to see.

Meadows: Were you alone?

Adams: A woman with me, sir.

Meadows: I said Let there be love,
And there wasn't enough light, you say?

Adams: We could see our own shapes, near enough,
But not the road. The road kept on dividing
Every yard or so. Makes it long.
We expected nothing like it, sir.
Ill-equipped, naked as the day,
It was all over and the world was on us
Before we had time to take cover.

Meadows: Stand at peace, Adam: do stand at peace.¹

Here the "colour on the brush, the extra-illumination of the idea"² has been worked into a pattern of existence

1. A Sleep of Prisoners.

2. C. Fry, 'Poetry and the Theatre', p.8.

which we recognise instantly to be our own.

We have noted that, for Fry, imaginative reality is what we have termed 'an overwhelming sense of the fact of existence'.¹ Fry himself says of the playwright, "he is exploring for the truth of the human creature, his truth in comedy or his truth in tragedy, because over and above the drama of his action and conflicts and everyday predicaments is the fundamental drama of his ever existing at all."² Fry, like Eliot, Abercrombie and Yeats³ makes the all-important distinction between the real and the actual, between the "false god" of surface appearances, the "domestication of the enormous miracle"⁴ and the "incredible", the "whirlwind"⁵ reality which is the unchanging truth of our being. It is this genuine spiritual reality which is "the province of poetry",⁶ for "poetry is the language in which man explores his own amazement. It is the language in which he speaks of himself and his predicament as though for

1. See supra, p.373
2. 'The Contemporary Theatre', p.331.
3. See Chap. IV, pp.292 fll.
4. 'The Contemporary Theatre', p.331.
5. op.cit.
6. op.cit.

the first time"¹ - it is in fact concerned with the "innermost reality",² "the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance",³ "the reality that is in our minds".⁴

It should be noted at this point, that while Eliot, Abercrombie and Yeats formulate their distinction between reality and actuality with specific reference to poetic drama, Fry, after his initial statement of the playwright's noblest function,⁵ tends to apply his critical remarks to poetic language alone. Nevertheless, we must not overlook Fry's demand for a "theatre at full pressure" and his definition of the "full pressure of life" as "the rough and tumble of the spirit and the flesh together, the two levels on which all our actions simultaneously perform, and all our actions, in this sense, are the action of poetry".⁶ Here we are referred

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1. op.cit.
 2. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.259.
 3. T.S. Eliot, Intro. to Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition, p.9.
 4. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p.120.
 5. 'The Contemporary Theatre', p.331, "exploring for the truth etc."
 6. op.cit., p.332.

back to Abercrombie's demand for a poetic drama of which every formal aspect, character and plot as well as language, shall be "in the scale --- of the conceptual poetry",¹ and to Eliot's search for "a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and musical order".²

Much has been said, perhaps too much, on Fry's poetic diction, and any study of the comedies inevitably gives rise to phrases such as "a sea of dazzling verbal invention",³ and "Elizabethan amplitude of phrase".⁴ Nevertheless, any critic, accustomed as he is to the plain fare of a prosaic theatre, may be forgiven for the delight which he takes in this shining, sensuous, exuberant language, this truly "abundant, resonant, beautiful, laughing, living speech".⁵ We must not, however, let our enthusiasm for this exciting diction carry us beyond a clear-sighted evaluation of Fry's merit as a dramatist. The language of these plays must

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1. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.256.
 2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.85.
 3. Review of The Lady's Not For Burning, New Statesman and Nation.
 4. J.C. Trewin, The Theatre Since 1900, 1951, p.292.
 5. W.B. Yeats, 'Preface to The Well of the Saints', The Cutting of an Agate, p.115.

be viewed, not as poetic anthology, but in relationship to the plays themselves. It is by now a commonplace to say that Fry is drunk with words, and to say it with the implication that his work contains more "art" than "matter". Can we, however, dismiss A Phoenix Too Frequent,¹ The Lady's Not For Burning,² and Venus Observed³ - the plays at which this charge is most frequently levelled - as mere poetic verbiage inadequately justified by an occasional observation on the meaning of existence?

Our primary defence of Fry must be that his characters meet the demands of genuine poetic drama in that they are "in the scale ... of the conceptual poetry".⁴ If, for example, we examine characters such as Thomas Mendip, Jennet Jourdemayne, The Duke of Attair and Perpetua, we find that they have indeed "undergone a certain powerful simplification and exaggeration, so that the primary impulses of being are infinitely more evident in what they do and say than in the speech and action of actuality's affairs."⁵ The characters in Fry's plays

1. C.Fry, A Phoenix Too Frequent, 1946.

2. C. Fry, The Lady's Not For Burning, 1949.

3. C. Fry, Venus Observed, 1950.

4. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.256.

5. op.cit., p.254.

are undeniably larger than life. They are more charming, more witty, more sensitive, more emotional, more perceptive, - in every way set above the normal run of our fellow creatures. These characters "are poetry, and were poetry before they began to speak poetry: it would be a wrench for them not so to utter themselves".¹

Furthermore, it seems to me criticism of these characters on the grounds that they 'all speak alike' entirely misses one of Fry's greatest dramatic achievements - the creation of a poetic world in which characters converse in their own natural idiom. Within the confines of the dramatist's new found convention the differentiation of character is convincing enough,² and this age which is desperately bewailing its lack of traditional dramatic form scarcely criticises Shakespeare because his characters 'all speak alike'.

The underlying concept of the comedies, as indeed of all Fry's dramatic writing, is the nature and purpose of existence. Fry defines comedy as "the comment on the human dilemma",³ and though the "human dilemma" is wildly exaggerated in the plots of his comedies,

1. op.cit., p.254.

2. Compare, for example, Doto and Dynamene in A Phoenix Too Frequent, or Thomas and Richard in The Lady's Not For Burning.

3. 'The Contemporary Theatre', p.332.

we willingly suspend our disbelief in this exaggeration. With genuine humour, Fry substantiates the mystery of our being in the fantastic contradictions of a world in which Virilius's body is made the scapegoat of Dynamene's love, in which Thomas's pursuit of death flings him into the arms of life, and in which the Duke's discovery of true values leads to his own downfall. The perplexity of the "enormous miracle"¹ of existence is built into the dramatic action, and where it is expressly stated, this statement is the spontaneous outcome of the nexus of Fry's intensely conceived characters with the events in which they are involved. Dynamene is startled and distressed by the resurgence of her youthful joy in life, and her bewildered

What appears
Is so unlike what is. And what is madness
To those who only observe, is often wisdom
To those to whom it happens,²

breaks naturally from the surface of the plot. Thomas, torn apart by the conflict between his reason and his emotions, cries aloud for some solution to

1. op.cit., p.331.

2. A Phoenix Too Frequent.

Creation's vast and exquisite
 Dilemma! where altercation thrums
 In every granule of the Milky Way,
 Persisting still in the dead-sleep of the moon,
 And heckling itself hoarse in that hot-head
 The sun,¹

while the Duke, suddenly defeated, sardonically excuses

All foundering, all not finding,
 All irreconcilability,
 All the friction of this great orphanage
 Where no one knows his origin and no one
 Comes to claim him.²

Fry's diction is evolved from the fusion
 of his poetic heritage with the rhythms and phrases of
 everyday speech. He looks back to the Elizabethans and
 the romantic poets of the nineteenth century for
 an anthology of extravagant, sensuous imagery -

A glittering smear, the snail-trail of the sun
 Where it crawled with its golden shell into the hills.³

The interminable tumbling of the great grey
 Main of moonlight, washing over
 The little oyster-shell of this month of April.⁴

A cold bell sounding in a golden month.⁵

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1. The Lady's Not For Burning, Act II.
 2. Venus Observed, Act III.
 3. The Lady's Not For Burning, Act II.
 4. op.cit.
 5. A Phoenix Too Frequent.

A girl on an Easter Monday
Under a Wedgewood sky.¹

Think what deeds of spring are done
By the glow-worm light of a primrose.²

Here we must immediately offer criticism. This language is beautiful, and it evokes the mood of the comedies from the delicate exuberance of April to the mellow, "falling cadence"³ of autumn, but it is not strictly dramatic, - that is it does not trace the movement of a specifically dramatic emotion. Furthermore, Fry's persistent and prodigal use of adjectives and adjectival phrases, while making for a relaxed, allusive poetic beauty, dulls the urgency of his diction and shows the dialogue into easy, soporific rhythms. It has often been pointed out that Eliot is poor quarry for the anthologists, but there is a greater imaginative integrity behind his dedication to poetry which is genuinely dramatic - "that is, it does not interrupt but intensifies the dramatic situation".⁴

More successful and significant is Fry's revival of the dead words and images in everyday use.

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1. Venus Observed, Act I.
 2. op.cit., Act III.
 3. op.cit.
 4. 'Poetry and Drama', p.81.

Poetic phrases ~~intended~~ in the living language are reanimated to a fresh urgency, and words are refocussed by their context into a new and compelling significance. Moses has Aaron "by the scruff of the heart",¹ God is conceived as "the infinite eavesdropper",² water runs with "girlish giggles",³ "innocence" is on at a "rakish angle",⁴ and Tyson's statement strikes Tappercoom with "a dull thud".⁵ Similarly, puns are frequently used, with varying success, ranging from the pleasing vivacity of "the all unhallows Eve to his poor Adam"⁶ to the abysmal depths of Thomas's request for "a longitude with no platitude".⁷ Certainly, Fry is here "hell-bent on animating"⁸ his poetry.

The great weakness of Fry as a dramatic poet is his tendency to let his delight in his own verbal invention get out of dramatic control. The contemporary audience tends to overlook, or indeed to revel in his outrages, to enjoy the irony of his self consciousness coyly expressed in phrases such as "what a wonderful

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1. The Firstborn, Act III, Sc.I.
 2. op.cit., Act I, Sc.2.
 3. The Lady's Not For Burning, Act I.
 4. op.cit.
 5. op.cit., Act II.
 6. op.cit., Act III.
 7. op.cit.
 8. 'When Poets Write Plays', p.16.

thing is metaphor",¹ or

It would be fanciful
No doubt to say that the moon has placed a penny,²
Not on the dead but on the living eye of the sun,

and blatantly enjoyed in the deliberate linguistic tours de force of Perpetua's deliverance on the sentence³ and Jennet's mathematical extravaganza.⁴ This, however, is merely making virtue of a serious fault. Fry's jocular use of the term "fanciful" gives the critic rope with which the playwright may narrowly escape the hanging. Our belief in his integrity is seriously marred by astroids on their "way to a heavenly spittoon",⁵ by the bringers of bad news "breaking the sun" over their "knees",⁶ by an understanding of others that's as "remote" to the Duke

As a seaside lodging-house
To a passing whate".⁷

This is mere verbal intoxication revealing itself in the

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1. The Lady's Not For Burning, Act I.
 2. Venus Observed, Act I.
 3. op.cit., Act II, Sc.2.
 4. The Lady's Not For Burning, Act II.
 5. op.cit.
 6. The Boy with a Cart.
 7. Venus Observed, Act I.
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most undignified gymnastics.

The Dark is Light Enough,¹ the last of the seasonal comedies² and Fry's most recent play, is disappointing. Although, in this play, the cool, plain language of the characters firmly outlines both dramatic and spiritual event, the total impression does not wholly satisfy us. The chief fault would seem to be that Fry forces the spiritual issue, especially in the face of characters which are not genuinely "in the scale --- of the conceptual poetry".³ Here character which is not truly larger than life is persistently inflated by the comments of others. There is a brave attempt to establish Richard Gettner as a dynamic force of destruction, but the character himself misfires as a poor shadow of Mendip and Attair, and all too frequently his quest for a purpose in existence sinks to a querulous peevishness. The character of Rosmarin is the greatest weakness in the play. We are constantly required to regard her as a presiding power over the lives of others, to see her

1. C. Fry, The Dark is Light Enough, 1954.

2. A Winter Comedy.

3. L. Abercrombie, 'The Function of Poetry in the Drama', p.256.

Backing a man up against eternity
 Until he hardly has the nerve to remain mortal,¹

while, in fact, we become increasingly irritated with her eccentricity and her calculated childishness. At the approach of her death amid the wailing of every village within a radius of miles and her followers' gross exaggeration of the significance of her loss -

You would think she would somehow have taken
 The world with her,²

we are left wondering what all the commotion is about. Fry fails resoundingly in his attempt to invest this self-consciousness and often sentimental woman with a godlike aura, for she does not convince us as the embodiment of spiritual strength.

Here frequent explicit discussion on the nature of existence tends to take on the nature of one of Rosmarin's Thursday evenings. Character here is impregnated not with a sense of its "own amazement"³ rising naturally from the situation in which it is placed,

1. The Dark is Light Enough, Act I.

2. op.cit., Act III.

3. 'The Contemporary Theatre', p.331.

but with an idiosyncratic awareness which siezes every situation as an opportunity for metaphysical dissertation. The theme of the play is not truly implicit in the action and in the experience of the characters.

The work of Fry is an outstanding achievement in the history of the drama of this century. His approach to the re-instatement of poetry in the theatre is directly opposite to that of Eliot, for even while Eliot is cautiously attempting to wean the age on a verse which "should have its effect upon the hearers, without their being conscious of it",¹ Fry deliberately displays the richest fare at his command for the temptation of his audience. Nevertheless, Fry's demand for lavish poetic diction on the stage is significantly prefaced with the warning "so long as the riches aren't hung on a corpse",² and, though he may at times be accused of allowing his enthusiasm for words to exceed dramatic necessity, both the form and content of his drama is adapted to the contemporary needs, and he faces up to the challenge of the prose play's urgent, though limited, treatment of present day existence - "there need be no difference in

1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.71.

2. 'When Poets Write Plays', p.17.

kind between the poet's theatre and the theatre that is called Realistic, but only a difference in range"¹ - in short, "if the poetic drama is to reconquer its place", it must "enter into overt competition with prose drama".²

We have mentioned Fry's religious plays in relationship to the movement to evolve a religious drama which shall be capable of meeting the requirements of our own age. Indeed, looking back over the past twenty years we see that the development of a living poetic drama in England is to be measured chiefly by the growth of a body of truly contemporary religious plays. The religious dramatists of this century are mainly responsible for the restoration of verse as a medium of dramatic speech in that they have employed verse in the writing of plays dealing with religious matter in terms of contemporary thought and experience, of plays which, in this respect, can justly claim to have entered "into overt competition with prose drama".³

Significantly, it is on the religious drama of our time that the impact of T.S. Eliot is most apparent.

1. op.cit.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', p.447.

3. op.cit.

Eliot's work presents at once the initial inspiration and the high water mark of the movement. In The Rock and Murder in the Cathedral he points the way to the group of recent modern plays in which past and present are fused in the poetic truth of timeless spiritual experience, and it is, as we have noted,¹ to the impulse given by these early plays that we must refer the achievements of Fry, and of Charles Williams, Anne Ridler, and Ronald Duncan. In Eliot's later plays modern religious drama is seen at its finest hour, and, as yet, nothing has since been written worthy to stand alongside them.

As we have noted,² the revival of religious drama in England began as early as the late nineteenth century and continued in the twentieth century through the work of Housman, Masfield, Abercrombie and Bottomley. The writing of plays for performance at religious festivals³ had begun several years before Eliot's appearance on the dramatic scene, and indeed, as we are aware, Eliot himself was brought into the movement by

1. See supra, p. 351

2. See Chap. I, pp. ~~35~~ 78 ff.

3. For example, Masfield's The Coming of Christ, was performed at Canterbury in 1928, and Bottomley's The Acts of St. Peter, at Exeter in 1933.

commissions from the authorities responsible for these festival performances. What we claim, then, for Eliot, is not the **renaissance** of twentieth century English religious drama, but the renaissance of religious drama of truly living significance. We have only to compare the work of the religious dramatists of the first three decades of this century with the achievements of more recent years to measure the importance of Eliot's efforts to found a religious drama firmly rooted in our own life and experience.

Yeats, in the writing of Calvary,¹ had already anticipated Eliot's realisation of the need for a freer and more urgent treatment of religious subject matter. His later The Resurrection² is an even bolder handling of the New Testament. The mystic truth formulated in the words "God and man die each other's life, live each other's death"³ is dramatically substantiated by the experience of a Hebrew and a Greek whose respective conceptions of Christ crucified as mere man and Christ risen as mere phantom are confounded by the mystery of the body's resurrection, and the significance of this

1. See Chap. I, pp. 81-2.

2. W. B. Yeats, The Resurrection, 1931.

3. The Resurrection.

resurrection is broadened and dramatised by a simultaneous enactment of the recurrent death and rebirth of the Greek god Dionysus. The play is worked out successfully on the two levels of dramatic and spiritual development, and the spiritual climax is convincingly rendered in ~~the~~ dramatic terms. The Resurrection is clearly related to the work of Eliot and his followers in its aim to communicate timeless mystical experience in dramatic form.

In the same year in which The Family Reunion was published, Yeats, in his Purgatory¹, imaged Eliot's theme of eternal sin and expiation in terms of human relationship strikingly similar to those in Eliot's own play. Purgatory, like The Family Reunion, poses the conception of original sin through the urgent medium of a contemporary situation. In this play, which induces Eliot to say of Yeats "he solved his problem of speech in verse, and laid all his successors under obligation to him,"² the early tendency to superfluous lyricism has been suppressed, and the playwright has evolved a fluid colloquial verse strictly confined to the demands of the dramatic conception. Here poetry

1. W.B. Yeats, Purgatory, 1939.

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.75.

is essentially organic, tracing significance generated specifically by dramatic event. In Purgatory, Yeats approaches, perhaps more closely than any other British dramatist in this century, to the achievement of Eliot's later dramatic work - the communication of intense religious experience entirely in terms of a human intercourse.

In the year following the first production of Murder in the Cathedral, Charles Williams's Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury¹ was performed in Canterbury Cathedral. The great expectations for the future of poetic drama raised by the 1935 festival play were certainly not dashed by the achievement of the following year, and, though Williams's play falls short of Murder in the Cathedral, we acknowledge the boldness of his attempt to substitute for mere historical narrative the essence of a timeless religious experience applicable to our own and any age.

The significance of the action - Cranmer's passage from spiritual pride to a state of grace - is held by the figure of the Skeleton, at once an actor in and commentator upon the scene. The Skeleton himself represents grace, the annihilation of self; he is

1. C. Williams, Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, 1936.

the "delator of all things to their truth",¹ the "Judas who betrays men to God",² and it is he who directs Cranmer on his course towards self abnegation. Not the least of the many bold strokes in this play is the freedom with which this symbolic figure applies the spiritual significance of the play directly to the audience.

The grave weakness of the play is a fault which Eliot narrowly escaped in Murder in the Cathedral, if, indeed, in the presentation of his hero, he may be said to have escaped it.³ We refer to Williams's distinct tendency to allow spiritual significance to outrun the human situation from which it is evolved. If Thomas Becket's almost pure spirituality resulted in a certain bloodlessness at the human level of Murder in the Cathedral, in Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury Williams fails entirely to establish Cranmer or the action in which he is involved in human terms. The playwright does not allow realistic detail to impede the course of spiritual development, and, moreover, he tends to show an unbecoming impatience with his telescoped human

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1. Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, Pt.1.
 2. op.cit.
 3. See Chap.III, pp.221-4

situations which renders them to such a degree "shadows, and the strife with shadows,"¹ that, paradoxically, where underlying significance should be elicited from event, event seems incidental illustration to a declaimed significance. We learn very quickly that Eliot's method of approval^{ach} can all too easily be abused.

Seed of Adam² is an infinitely better play and one of the finest achievements in contemporary poetic drama. Here Williams's power of creating myth,³ already revealed in the early dramatic poem The Rite of the Passion⁴ and again later in the charming modern morality plays, The House by the Stable⁵ and Grab and Grace⁶, is seen at its best. As Williams himself points out, "this Nativity is not so much a presentation of the historic facts as of their spiritual value."⁷ Here in his

1. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.I.
2. C. Williams, Seed of Adam, 1937, Seed of Adam and Other Plays, 1948.
3. With particular reference to this play we may well compare Eliot's Tempters in Murder in the Cathedral.
4. C. Williams, The Rite of Passion, 1929, Three Plays, 1931.
5. C. Williams, The House by the Stable, 1939, Seed of Adam and Other Plays.
6. C. Williams, Grab and Grace, 1941, Seed of Adam and Other Plays.
7. Appendix to Seed of Adam and Other Plays.

"usual way", Williams has "abolished Time and Space,"¹ and in the living imagination he dramatises the truth of the Nativity by a purely symbolic use of biblical character and event. While Man, in the form of Adam and Augustus^{Caesar}, seeks for a way to regain paradise, his offspring take interest only in the commercial and intellectual occupations offered by Gaspar and Melchior, symbols of wealth and philosophy.² Adam's daughter Mary, characterised by love, is married to Joseph, and, just before the birth of her child, the world is attacked by the Third King~~s~~, symbol of man's despair, and by his Mother, Hell, by whom he is frequently devoured. The vanquishing of Hell is imaged in a stylised struggle between Mary and the Negress, who ultimately acts as midwife at the birth of Christ. Here Williams has achieved a perfect fusion of form and content. The poetry of the play is wholly contained in its concept, and the concept is flawlessly substantiated in the objective presentation.

We have only to compare this bold symbolic play with the simple dramatised narrative of a play such as Housman's Bethlehem³ to estimate the change which has been

1. op.cit.

2. As the Editor of Seed of Adam and Other Plays notes, Williams has reversed the gifts of Melchior and Caspar.

3. See Chap.I, p. 79

effected in the religious drama since the early years of this century. Even while Williams ironically repudiates over-emphasis on Eliot's influence - "Mr. Eliot has made choruses a little difficult. I know all about the Greeks but they do not prevent one being told one is copying Mr. Eliot,"¹ we are justly conscious of the fact that Eliot has gone before.

In The House of Octopus² Williams attempts not merely the spiritual interpretation of known event, but the fabrication of an original dramatic structure which shall image exactly his imaginatively apprehended truth. Here he is moving ~~along~~^{away} from The Rock and Murder in the Cathedral towards the later plays of Eliot in which a deep and sustained religious experience is substantiated by a myth of the dramatist's own making. In this play evil is conceived as the neighbouring island of P'o - l'u seeking to absorb by plausible offers the new found missionary colony. The drama works on two levels of understanding - on the surface level the Christians are threatened by physical death in the clutches of the cephalopods of P'o - l'u, and at the depths, where

1. Appendix to Seed of Adam and Other Plays.
2. G. Williams, The House of Octopus, 1945.

"the cephalopodic process is not only physical,"¹ man's soul is eternally exposed to the danger of absorption by the "spiritual octopus."² The symbolism is intensified further by the rendering of Anthony's spiritual pride in terms of Assantu's desire to become the pagan god whom he serves, and to be not the eaten, but the eater of the flesh. The action of the play is directed and interpreted by the Flame, symbol of primal energy and the Holy Ghost, a figure closely related to the Skeleton in Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury.

The House of Octopus is not an unqualified success. The symbolism is not entirely happy, nor is it always fully and clearly worked out. Nevertheless there are some pregnant and intensely dramatic scenes, notably the re-enactment of Christ's temptation in terms of the Marshal's attempt to win Anthony over to the service of the "Infinite Emperor."³ The greatness of the play lies in Williams's powerful and wholly dramatic communication of urgent spiritual truth.

It is significant that, in his later work, Williams turns from the distinctly Elizabethan

1. The House of Octopus, Act.II.

2. op.cit., Act.III.

3. op.cit., Act.II.

versification of his initial dramatic experiments¹ to a much looser alliterative rhythm with frequent internal rhyme. The language employed in Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury and Seed of Adam is strongly reminiscent both of the morality plays and of Murder in the Cathedral,² for the versification of which Eliot refers us back to Everyman.³ If Williams refuses Eliot his chorus he must at least acknowledge this linguistic debt.

Williams's drama is in many ways personal and distinctive, but it bears some marks of Eliot's direct influence, and, more significant, it is clearly in the spirit with which Eliot wished to impregnate contemporary religious drama. At its best, Williams's work is a powerful and urgent dramatic communication of an intensely religious experience, "a combination of religious and ordinary dramatic interest,"⁴ in which "the religious and the dramatic are not merely combined, but wholly fused."⁵

1. See, for example, The Witch, and The Chaste Wanton (the latter is admittedly pastiche), Three Plays, 1931.

2. cf. "Steed and speech go reined and spurred, I learned easier the riding than the reading; I took tenderness rather than tyranny and made my gain." Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, Pt.I. with "Confined in Canterbury, realmless ruler, Self-bound servant of a powerless Pope." Murder in the Cathedral, Pt.I. See also Chap.III, footnote to p.218

3. 'Poetry and Drama', p.77.

4. 'Religious Drama. Mediaeval and Modern', p.10.

5. op.cit.

Dorothy L. Sayers' The Zeal of Thy House¹ is a work of considerably less imaginative intensity than either of the plays which immediately preceded its production at Canterbury. The structure of the play is plainly influenced by The Rock. At the surface level of the plot it is simply a record of events in the building of the cathedral, garnished with William's dissertation on the creative joy.² The moral significance of the play is pointed by the apt singing of the choir which punctuates the action with commentary psalms, and by the presiding group of angels standing above the progress of event. Here we touch on the root of the essential difference between Miss Sayers' play and Eliot's - a difference between moral and spiritual significance. Eliot's Chorus distils from a panoramic presentation of unchanging humanity a permanent spiritual truth, whereas Michael's chastisement of William is merely an ethical interpretation of the particular situation, and the ethical significance can scarcely bear Michael's final attempt to inflate it to truth of universal application. What significance there is is built into the dramatic

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1. D.L. Sayers, The Zeal of Thy House, 1937, (first produced at the Canterbury Festival, June 12th, 1937). Four Sacred Plays, 1948.
 2. The Zeal of Thy House, III.

action itself, but our final impression is that of a personal rather than a cosmic revelation. Miss Sayers does not succeed in convincing us that the experience of William of Sens embodies permanent human reality.

The Devil to Pay,¹ produced at Canterbury in 1939, is a pleasing translation of legend into human terms, and a convincing justification of the ways of God to Faustus, but here again Miss Sayers is concerned more with the moral issue than with any depth of religious experience. The underlying concept lacks genuine poetic intensity. Above all, both The Zeal of Thy House and The Devil to Pay are wanting in originality. The surface drama is modernised after the colloquial manner of the prose plays The Man Born to be King² and He That Should Come³ but the Christian truth of the plays is conventionally formulated and presented in traditional language suited to so conservative a piety. We may well compare Thomas's subjugation of spiritual pride

'Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain.
Temptation shall not come in this land again.

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1. D.L. Sayers, The Devil to Pay, 1939, Four Sacred Plays, 1948.
 2. D.L. Sayers, The Man Born to be King, 1943.
 3. D.L. Sayers, He That Should Come, 1938, Four Sacred Plays, 1948.

The last temptation is the greatest treason:
To do the right deed for the wrong reason.
The natural vigour in the venial sin,¹
Is the way in which our lives begin,"¹

with William's²

"O, I have sinned. The eldest sin of all,
Pride, that struck down the morning star from Heaven
Hath struck me down from where I sat and shone
Smiling on my new world.
. Thou that didst make the world
And wilt not let one thing that Thou hast made,
No, not one sparrow, perish without Thy Will
(Since what we make, we love) - for that love's sake
Smite only me and spare my handiwork."²

Miss Sayers' conception of damnation in pride is, like
the rhythms and images in which it is expressed, merely
derivative. Eliot's is an essentially personal expression
of spiritual experience comprehended in the living
imagination.

The Just Vengeance³, written for the 750th
anniversary Festival in Lichfield Cathedral, is a much
more valuable achievement than either of the plays
produced at Canterbury. Here at last Miss Sayers makes
a genuine evaluation of religious historical event in
terms of contemporary thought and outlook, and ~~of~~ thus of
everlasting ^{human} significance. "In form, the drama is a

1. Murder in the Cathedral, Pt. I.
2. The Zeal of Thy House, IV.
3. D.L. Sayers, The Just Vengeance, 1946, Four Sacred Collected Plays, 1948.

miracle-play of Man's insufficiency and God's redemptive act set against the background of contemporary crisis,"¹ and the contemporary view-point is represented by an airman, who "in the moment of death" is "shown in an image the meaning of the atonement."² Miss Sayers, in a way which for her is not so "usual" has here "abolished time and space"³ to reach the core of mystical experience. In this play Christian truth is taken fully into the imaginative comprehension and redelivered in a drama of a genuine conceptual intensity.

Character and action is symbolical, imaging the play's spiritual content. The citizens of Lichfield are all humanity, the Airman our own age, and the characters from the Bible enact ever recurrent human truth. The airman defies the testimony of humanity and the Church to the need for eternal atonement -

"I do not believe in all this suffering -
I do not see the sense of a suffering God -
Why should anyone suffer?"⁴

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1. D.L. Sayers, Introduction to The Just Vengeance, Four Sacred Plays, 1948, p.280.
 2. op.cit.
 3. C. Williams, Appendix to Seed of Adam and Other Plays.
 4. The Just Vengeance.

Until, apprehending the significance of this atonement in relationship to unchanging human reality, he finds himself involuntarily demanding it, crying "Crucify! crucify!"¹, and acquiescing to the twofold condemnation

"In the blood of Abel
Unjustly, and justly in the blood of Cain;
All men are so, and God, being made man,
Must walk the road that man chose for himself,
Carrying man's sin and innocence to the cross;
Thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness."²

He, with all humanity, accepts the burden of the Cross.

The citizens of Lichfield are clearly descended from the women of Canterbury. In this play, the function of the Chorus is almost identical with that of Eliot's in Murder in the Cathedral, for, not only do they dramatise the significance of the action, but their own spiritual awareness is modified by the events which they witness. In fact these witnesses pass from fear and rejection of the main action to a voluntary acceptance resolved in the dramatic action itself, for ultimately they run down to shoulder the cross which they had refused. The play closes on a note of joy, still half bewildered,

"Answer to our surprise,
Seeing with our eyes,
The obscure demanding
Of bowels and bones and heart, each feeling part
Made suddenly plain in the brain and understanding.
Deal gently with us, because we are so much astonished

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

To find ourselves thus replenished."¹

These rhythms and images are sufficiently familiar to require no further comment.

A study of Miss Jayers' work, with the exception of The Just Vengeance, inevitably leaves one demanding of her a greater intensity of imagination and a handling of religious truth equal to the boldness and freedom with which she treats historical fact. Her approach to religious experience tends to be timid and conventional, lacking the vitality and audacity which Eliot demanded in order that a truly living religious drama may be evolved. We are reminded that, "if we want a living religious drama we must be prepared to accept something less sedative, and perhaps something which may cause us some discomfort and embarrassment in the process of getting used to it."²

Anne Ridler's Cain³ is representative of what we now recognise to be a characteristic approach to the problem of adapting the poetic drama to the demands of an audience which has, for too long, found satisfaction

1. The Just Vengeance.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'Religious Drama. Mediaeval and Modern,' p.9.

3. A.Ridler, Cain, 1943.

of its needs in the imaginatively restricted world of the prose play. Mrs. Ridler's handling of her material is more tentative than that of Eliot or of Charles Williams, but here again we have the familiar attempt to relate the essential significance of known event to the thought and experience of our own time. The characters in Cain react variously to the situation in which they are placed, and in each reaction we recognise some part of our own thought. The life of Adam and Eve, with its "times of peace" when "supper and bright fire annul the day's hostility"¹ is a symbol of the daily round of existence, Abel signifies man's goodness, while Cain is the consciousness of suffering humanity, "capable of intelligence, of murder and mercy,"² forever destined to sin but still to find redemption, "hopeless, yet fed on salvation."³

Mrs. Ridler's method of presenting a poetic vision of modern life on the stage is typical of that of a vast number of poetic dramatists' writing over the past twenty years. If an audience which inevitably

1. Cain.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

associates contemporary character and situation with everyday speech refuses the overt rendering of its own world, in poetic times, this rendering must be disguised in character and situation which is not contemporary, and therefore acceptable. In Cain, the Biblical character and event is gradually identified with our own existence -

"Some of them think they would have acted differently
In Cain's position: simple to refrain from sin
In every given case except one's own case:
But in that, how different, appear the possibilities,
How huge the provocation."¹

and, almost before we have time to realise what is happening, the Biblical world has become our "own street, emptied of all hope" and we feel "the weight of awakening to a sullen morning."² Where the dramatist fails is in her distinct tendency to over-explicit declamation of the significance of the play's action. We may well compare Cain with the treatment of the same subject matter in Fry's A Sleep of Prisoners. Where Fry lets his presentation of the event speak for itself, Mrs. Ridler allows Michael and Cain too great a weight of direct interpretation.

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

The Shadow Factory¹ is an altogether more exciting dramatic experiment, particularly in that it is one of the few plays in which an attempt has been made to follow Eliot in his direct invasion on what has erroneously become regarded as the territory of the prose drama. The world of The Shadow Factory is the world of Eliot's early poems and of Sweeney Agonistes, although Mrs. Ridler, unlike Eliot, has found it necessary to justify her sinister conception by referring us to material evidence of the modern tendency to regimentation, and, in doing so, has considerably detracted from its potential strength. The audience may all too easily ~~disassociate~~ ^{dissociate} this muted 1984² with their own daily lives.

The great weakness of The Shadow Factory is the dramatist's failure to evolve spiritual development from the main action of the play, and to resolve it again in dramatic terms. We identify the values implied by Garrick's mural with the scene at the Crib, but no dramatic progression is established between the two.

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1. A. Ridler, The Shadow Factory, 1946.
 2. G. Orwell, 1984, 1949.

Spiritual resurgence is not generated by dramatic event, and the communication of Christian truth is effected only through overt poetic declaration in what are, despite each character's personal application of this truth, "passages of poetry which might be spoken by anybody."¹ Moreover, when the "trance-like state"² has passed, we do not find sufficient compensation in the remaining action's feeble indication of at least a partial permanent modification.

There is distinct evidence in this play of the direct influence of Eliot on the ideas of the dramatist. The conception as a whole, involving contrast between the terrible futility of the actual and the genuine reality of spiritual truth is clearly in the Eliot tradition. Furthermore, we recognise the familiar manner of presenting the unexpected stirring of the dormant spirit through images of terror -

"Returning home, he glances up to see the malice
 peep from the window;
 Not to be caught, but surely it winked at him just now?
 - - - - -
 And if he unmasks the terror, learns to deride
 The groping maggot, the hand under the stair,

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.80.

2. op.cit.

His fear will quietly move to another chair,¹
 and the absence of spiritual consciousness in ~~terms~~^{terms} of
 superficial everyday existence -

"Our pleasures monotonous, our loves inadequate,
 Poverty constant, if not extreme;
 We have been starved of more than food; and yet
 we have endured."²

However, this evidence is of no great significance.
 Eliot's ideas are not developed or modified by any notable
 originality of thought and we are reminded of his own
 comment 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."³

More worthy of comment is Mrs. Ridler's
 adoption of Eliot's versification. It is with some
 success that she employs stylised everyday conversation -
 a marked device in Sweeney Agonistes⁴ - to point the

1. The Shadow Factory, Act.I, Sc.1.
2. op.cit., Act.II, Sc.2.
3. T.S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', Selected Essays, p.206.
4. See Chap.III, pp 166 fl.

vacuity of ordinary intercourse -

1st Girl: "He's not back yet from lunch

2nd Girl: (entering) Not back?

1st Girl: What'll we do?

2nd Girl: O, leave the note,
put it on his desk, and let's get back,
I know we'll catch it for coming here.

1st Girl: They sent us up. And anyhow
I don't give nothin' for what they say.
What can they do?

2nd Girl: Give us the sack.

1st Girl: Soon get another job just as good. (She
puts note down on desk).

2nd Girl: Or just as bad. We'd best go back -
(Whirr of machines. The figures begin movement).
They're starting up.

1st Girl: Best go back."¹

Furthermore, a sincere effort is made to handle the loose colloquial verse form evolved in the writing of The Family Reunion, and the dramatist succeeds in moving from -

"It isn't popular, I'll admit.
Even the Unions opposed it at first:
But I stood out for it; I can't afford to lose it.
You know the advertising maxim:
Make your point by repetition,
Never mind the irritation,"²

1. The Shadow Factory, Act.1, Sc.1.

2. op.cit.

to the greater insensivity of -

Perhaps we never extend our boundaries,
 But at some point they cease to seem important.
 Instead, we discover a certainty of good,
 quite impassible, quite inexpressible,
 Offering neither sweetness nor solace -
 No profit for us; and yet, strangely,
 This is joy, this is peace,"¹

without straining her medium. Her failure is in that she lacks the confidence to insist that "everything can be said in verse," "without recourse to prose",³ and she confesses her own weakness by breaking the tradition which she is attempting to establish.

Anne Ridler's adaptation of Eliot has produced no striking development of her master's thought and technique, but she has at least acknowledged the new approach to the century's need and attempted to further its cause. The same may be said, with serious reservation, of the work of Ronald Duncan. This Way to the Tomb⁴ is indeed an acknowledgement of Eliot, but an acknowledgement which amounts to little more than servile

1. op.cit., Act.II, Sc.3.

2. T.S. Eliot, 'The Aims of Poetic Drama,' (Adam), p.12.

3. 'Poetry and Drama', p.83.

4. R. Duncan, This Way to the Tomb, 1946.

imitation. In this play Duncan enthusiastically employs almost every aspect of Eliot's thought and technique. The theme of the Masque, damnation in pride, is the theme of Murder in the Cathedral, and the idea underlying the Anti-Masque's exposure of modern spiritual degeneracy is fundamental to Eliot's writings, both dramatic and poetic. Duncan reiterates Eliot's thought in terms almost identical with those used in the original. Our ordinary surface living is described as "distraction disguised as important actions,"¹ the **moment** of understanding is out of time, for "God stands outside of Time, alone in still contentment,"² and understanding for Antony is the realisation that "my own pride" is the "punctual jailer of my pride's own tyranny."³ He also adopts Eliot's methods of

1. This Way to The Tomb. The Masque.
cf. "What you call the normal
 Is merely the unreal and the unimportant."
The Family Reunion, Pt. II, Sc. 1
 and "Time-ridden faces
 Distracted from distraction by distraction."
Four quartets, 'Burnt Norton.'
2. op.cit. cf. "a moment in time and of time," The Rock, Pt. I
 and "the still point of the turning world,"
Four quartets, 'Burnt Norton.'
3. op.cit. cf. "Is there no way, in my soul's sickness,
 Does not lead to damnation in pride?"
Murder in the Cathedral, Pt. I.

communication. The thoughts of Antony are objectified in symbolic character and action as Thomas's thoughts were objectified in the Tempters in Murder in the Cathedral, and the characters express themselves in rhythms and images all too easily recognisable,

Everyday treads on the toes of yesterday
 And to-day on the heels of tomorrow
 Which will come, but comes slowly,
 Slowly to those who worry.
 Monday means firewood; today we cut firewood
 All day today we have been cutting firewood;
 Olive burns well, but it is tough on the saw and
 Hard on the axe,
 And both are hard on the shoulder.¹
 I am used to work but not to worry.¹

The scene at the tomb of Saint Antony, in which various of the pilgrims confess their fears, is little more than a confused revival of the experience expressed by the Chorus to Murder in the Cathedral -

I am afraid of remembering
 that which I have forgotten;
 I am afraid of forgetting
 that which I have remembered.

1. op.cit., cf. "And meanwhile we have gone on living,
 Living and partly living,
 Picking together the pieces,
 Gathering faggots at nightfall,
 Building a partial shelter,
 For sleeping, and eating and drinking
 and laughter."

Murder in the Cathedral, Pt. I.

For, all that I have is in dreams;
Dreams which I remembered to forget
and in dreams which I forgot to remember.¹

The term confused is used here with deliberation. Duncan is re-delivering imaginative truth which has not been assimilated and modified by his own imagination. His imagery is merely derivative, and since it does not trace experience fully comprehended in the dramatist's own imagination, the result is frequently an apparent poetic utterance which, as in the speech quoted above, means virtually nothing.

For his *Anti-Masque* Duncan is heavily indebted to Auden and Isherwood. A detailed comparison of his adaptation of the familiar Auden-Isherwood technique - satirical use of caricature, popular slogan, mass cultural methods, radio and popular song - would be fruitless. Suffice it to say that Duncan is attempting to do what has previously been done better, and what is, in any case, probably not worth the doing.

1. *op.cit.*, *The Anti-Masque*.

Even if we aside the fact that it is frequently mere plagiarism, This Way to the Tomb is a failure. The dramatist objectifies his hero's thought with some success and the re-appearance of the three symbolic characters in the Anti-Masque is neatly handled, but the great weakness of the play is the fact that Antony is so prone to "silent meditation",¹ the results of which are expressed in soliloquy on soliloquy. Here the dangers of Eliot's emphasis on inward significance are alarmingly apparent. In This way to the Tomb there is far too much overt declaration of spiritual development at the expense of essential dramatic action. Eliot only just succeeded in striking a balance between outer and inner action in Murder in the Cathedral. In Duncan's play the scales are heavily weighed down by disproportionate measures of meditative poetry altogether undramatic.

The merit of Stratton² is that it genuinely attempts to express what is, indeed, Eliot's and not Duncan's thought in terms of human relationship. Unfortunately the merit is confined to the attempt. In this play, in which Duncan shamelessly reproduces Eliot's ideas without an attempt to disguise the fact, the familiar theme of pride and self knowledge is openly

1. op.cit The Masque.

2. R. Duncan, Stratton, 1949.

declared in passages, too numerous to quote, which are plainly lifted direct from Eliot's own plays. We are not impressed by Courtenay's 'discovery' that

One can get so used to the mask
Which we think we are
That when we see ourselves as we are,
We do not recognise the grin.
It is as though I'd found all my life was sleep,
And what I thought were dreams was I awake.
In private nightmares are we each confined
Stalking the shadow of our own despair,¹

or by Stratton's not unexpected reply—

You mean that self-deception can be such
that reality appears illusion,²

and we weary of the monotonous repetition of Eliot's conceptions, too obviously half digested before their redelivery. The play treats of every idea put forward by Eliot - self discovery, hereditary sin, the intersection of time with eternity, the contrast between the actual and the real, the perpetual redemption of sin - and treats them without originality or even with complete understanding. It is particularly

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1. Stratton, Act I, Sc.1.
cf. particularly "The things I thought were real
are shadows, and the real
Are what I thought were private
shadows."
The Family Reunion, Pt.II.Sc.II.
2. op.cit.

interesting to note that Eliot's recourse, in The Family Reunion, to the "trance-like state"¹ which he himself deplored, is seized upon by Duncan as if, because Eliot used it, it had, of itself, some peculiar value to the poetic drama.

It is unfortunate that that part of Stratton which Duncan may claim for himself is at once the most serious fault in the play. Here, the dramatist has apparently mistaken the dramatic for the theatrical, and Eliot's imaginative truth appears in the ludicrous guise of what is, in fact, mere melodrama. If we compare with Stratton Eliot's own dramatisation of the reality of our heridity in The Confidential Clerk, we are immediately struck by the crudity of Duncan's presentation. The identification of Cory Stratton with his son, and the trial in which the Judge becomes the prisoner, has tremendous value as mere theatre, but it lacks the dramatic integrity demanded by the underlying theme of the play. The conception of the fusion of time with eternity is prostituted by this pandering to theatrical sensation. The presentation of self knowledge and spiritual blindness in terms of Cory's mirror gazing and

1. 'Poetry and Drama', p.80.

the loss of Maria's eyesight is merely cheap popularisation of what, in Eliot's work, was genuine imaginative reality.

If Duncan's work were original it would be important, but, in fact, it is both second-hand and second-rate. In Duncan are exhibited all the pitfalls to which the lesser dramatist is exposed by his enthusiasm for the work of a greater, and his plays are what, sooner or later, inevitably follows in the wake of a significant dramatic innovation. It is refreshing to note, that, in his latest ^{religious} play, Duncan has relied on his own dramatic talent. Our Lady's Tumbler¹ has no great imaginative intensity and inclines to be sentimental, but, by comparison with Duncan's previous work, there is a certain charm in its unpretentious simplicity.

Norman Nicholson's The Old Man of the Mountains² explores the instability of our own faith through the contemporary presentation of the story of Elijah. The raven in this play clearly refers us back to the choral commentary in The Rock, though we must credit Nicholson with a sincere effort to adapt what he has taken from

1. R. Duncan, Our Lady's Tumbler, 1951.

2. N. Nicholson, The Old Man of the Mountains, 1946.

Eliot to his personal thought. The marked defect of The Old Man of the Mountains is its serious lack of imaginative unity. The play falls apart into three sections - the choral interpretation by the raven, the realistic presentation of village character and speech - here we are strongly reminded of Obey's delightfully naturalistic Noé,¹ - and the notably "trance-like"² utterances of prophetic insight. The attempt to effect a transition between the two last leads to the bathos of remarks such as "why did I speak those words?",³ a weakness which Eliot did not altogether escape in The Family Reunion,⁴ and though Elijah has a legitimate excuse for oracular declamation, Nicholson, unlike Eliot, has to contend with the startling contrast of his own dialectal colloquialism. Furthermore, the dramatist fails to build the significance of his action into the action itself, isolating it in the surrounding commentary of the raven. The greatest failure in the play is its 'realistic' dialogue. The use of dialectal phrase is

1. A. Obey, Noé, 1931.

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p.80.

3. The Old Man of the Mountains, Pt.I.

4. cf. Agatha's "What have I been saying?", The Family Reunion, Pt.II, Sc.2.

pleasing enough, but Nicholson endows his characters, as did Abercrombie in his Gloucestershire plays,¹ with an artificial literary imagery drawn from the background to their lives. The result is the banalities of land "as dry as a badger's backside",² eyes that "shrivel like fried eggs"³ in the draught, and - surely a museum exhibit - a child

On the outskirts of the town of death,
Like the cabbages in the allotments.⁴

Nicholson's later Prophecy to the Wind⁵ is no more successful. As in Stratton, the literal treatment of Eliot's "loop in time"⁶ in this play leads the dramatist into severe trouble, and his serious intentions are ruined by ludicrous situations such as John's struggle to take Freya's earrings for fuse wire and Vikar's entry in an air-raid warden's helmet.

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1. See Chap.I, p. 68
 2. The Old Man of the Mountains, Pt.II.
 3. op.cit., Pt.III.
 4. op.cit., Pt.I.
 5. N. Nicholson, Prophecy to the Wind, 1949.
 6. The Family Reunion, Pt.I, Sc.1.

If Nicholson is not the man to follow Eliot's lead to greater achievements, nor is Robert Gittings, author of The Makers of Violence.¹ This simple moral illustration is garnished with a heightened language which finds no justification in any genuine poetic intensity of concept. Moreover, not only is the poetry of the play undramatic, but the most trivial flight of fancy is tortuously pursued, so that "accusations" are "slashed" about "like idiot schoolboys switching the heads off flowers",² the "overcoat" of an empire is "ripped inside-out, and sleeved and seamed with wave-threads",³ and, in fearful confusion, a "poor little candle flame" salves "the bite" of a "dog's tooth".⁴ This might well make even Eliot lose hope in the future of contemporary poetic drama.

We must not, however, in looking back over the drama of the past two decades, allow ourselves to be discouraged by some degree of failure. Of greater significance than any individual failure or success, is the evidence of the essential change which has come over the English drama during these years. For, clearly,

1. R. Gittings, The Makers of Violence, 1951.

2. The Makers of Violence.

3. op.cit.

4. op.cit.

there is evidence of such a change. Now that we are in a position to review the English dramatic scene from the heritage of Ibsen in England to the present day, we are immediately and forcibly struck by the tremendous alteration in dramatic outlook and technique between the drama of the early years of the century and that written since the middle thirties.

The great stride taken between these periods may be measured by a summary glance backward and forward over the years. Masefield and Abercrombie, inspired by the Irish Dramatic Movement, made an early attempt at treating realistic material in the spirit and language of poetry, that is, at bringing actual existence within the comprehension of the poetic imagination. Conscious, however, of their own limitation, they were careful to select an actual existence which lent itself to poetic treatment. The world of The Tragedy of Nan,¹ of Deborah² and of the Four Short Plays³ is not "some imaginary world totally unlike"⁴ our own, but neither is it "the world

1. See Chap.I, pp. 56 fl.

2. See Chap.I, pp. 65 fl.

3. See Chap.I, pp. 65 fl.

4. 'Poetry and Drama', p.79.

in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre."¹ It is a world sufficiently remote from our own to render the poeticizing of its experience acceptable to the contemporary audience, yet sufficiently closely related to life itself to justify it as a basis for the writer's poetic vision. By choosing country life as the subject matter for their poetic drama, Masefield and Abercrombie had the advantage of characters less far removed from the elemental forces of existence than those of modern society, and characters which might spontaneously express themselves in terms of imagery drawn from nature and in language heightened by the natural poetry to be found in dialectal speech. Furthermore, a modern audience will always incline to accept poetry on the lips of country people more readily than from characters which they immediately recognise to be like themselves, - any strangeness which they may feel can always be put down to the fact that country people are 'different' - and the audience will take poetry from them as it will from "personages dressed in the fashion of some distant age."²

1. op.cit.

2. op.cit.

We may well compare this early choice of subject with the starker world of The Shadow Factory, A Sleep of Prisoners, of the plays of Auden and Isherwood and of Spender. Here the dramatists are allowing themselves no concessions, but facing up directly to the problem of presenting, on the stage, "people dressed like ourselves living in houses and apartments like ours, and using telephones and motor cars and radio sets".¹ They are not always successful, but there is a great measure of credit in the attempt alone. This pioneering work offers hope for the future - ordinary life has been brought into the theatre and there can be no turning back from it now.

The poet dramatists of the last twenty years have not always made such a direct attack on the refractory material of contemporary existence. As we have shown, one of the most favoured methods of approach to modern existence has been through the presentation of uncontemporary material in terms of contemporary thought and experience. Here again we may well draw a comparison between the drama written after the thirties and that which came before. We may, for instance, set the work of Phillips, Binyon, Bottomley and Sturge Moore against that of the dramatists writing after Eliot.

1. op.cit.

These early playwrights saw no possibilities in their historic material beyond the re-enaction of the narrative through 'heroic' character and action decorated with those false externals of poetic drama - archaic, inflated language and outdated costume. In direct contrast we have the more recent insistence on historical and Biblical themes which shall be truly living, with timeless character expressing itself in the thought and language of our own day. We have only to place Nero¹ or Attila² alongside The Firstborn, or King Lear's Wife³ by Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury to realise the great progress which has been made.

As we have seen, evidence of the most outstanding development is to be found in a comparison between the early and later religious drama of the first half of this century. An enormous expanse of ground has been covered within a very short time. Within the space of fifty years religious drama has progressed from the timorous dramatisation of Biblical narrative to the rendering of spiritual experience in terms of modern

1. See Chap.I, p.47

2. See Chap.I, pp.48-49.

3. See Chap.I, pp.70-1

life and thought. After the thirties the religious play is marked by a new freedom of treatment and an increasing urgency of conception. We may well compare the tentative handling of the Nativity in Housman's Bethlehem¹ with the audaciously free treatment of the same subject in Seed of Adam and The Shadow Factory. Masefield in The Trial of Jesus,² The Coming of Christ,³ and Easter⁴ had shown some originality of conception in the introduction of his choral commentary, stylised symbolical figures, and realistic characters measuring by their reaction the emotional significance of the event, but his efforts towards a bolder treatment of religious subject matter are as nothing compared with the contemporary urgency of the plays of Fry, Williams, Ridler, Duncan and Nicholson. In Cain, The Firstborn, The Boy with a Cart, The House of Octopus, This Way to the Tomb, and The Old Man of the Mountains, the conventional piety of Masefield, of The Little Plays of Saint Francis⁵

1. See Chap.I, p. 79

2. See Chap.I, p. 80

3. See Chap.I, p. 81

4. See Chap.I, p. 81

5. See Chap.I, p. 79

and The Acts of St. Peter¹ has been shattered by an integrity of imagination which insists on the right of the religious drama to deal with every aspect of contemporary experience, however unpalatable it may be to the traditional outlook on the subject of religion. Here is a significant acknowledgement of the belief that "the creation of a living religious drama in our time is not to be conceived as a problem entirely isolated from that of the secular theatre",² that "conventionality is a bad thing",³ and that "if we want a living religious drama we must be prepared to accept something less sedative, and perhaps something which may cause us some discomfort in the process of getting used to it."⁴

Finally there has, during the past twenty years, been an outstanding development in the use of verse as a medium for dramatic speech. Masefield, Drinkwater, and especially Abercrombie, had recognised the need for a dramatic poetry in closer touch with everyday language. They attempted and effected improvement

1. See Chap.I, pp 86-7

2. T.S.Eliot, 'Religious Drama. Medieval and Modern', p.10.

3. op.cit. p.16.

4. op.cit., p.9.

on the dead language of the nineteenth century, but they did not succeed in establishing a traditional form of contemporary versification. Their approach to the problem was through an experimentation with their dramatic heritage. Like the poet dramatists of the nineteenth century, they adopted the Elizabethan blank verse form, but they made an effort to revive it with rhythms and phrases from colloquial speech. Their efforts, however, inevitably proved inadequate for the need of our own time. A new form of verse was demanded, a form in which might be expressed at once an intense poetic conception and the exchanges of modern social intercourse. Moreover, a new form of verse was found. We have compared a passage in Abercrombie's The Adder with a passage from Tennyson's Harold¹ in order to show the progress made in the evolution of dramatic verse during the early pioneering years in the poetic drama of this century. Let us again compare the same passage with one taken from Anne Ridler's The Shadow Factory. The difference is between a courageous attempt to mould the framework of the blank verse to our own speech resulting in a stilted, selfconscious approach to colloquialism, and this smoothly flowing yet controlled

1. See Chap.I, pp.66-7

versification.

No. For remember, the child disbelieves in its pain.
 A sick child thinks - if I went downstairs
 And had my breakfast, if the day were a usual day,
 I shouldn't feel ill any longer. The man
 Learns better, he thinks, but still in his heart
 He is sure that pain, even death, is unreal.
 And yet how vivid the ineluctable pain!
 How final the death!¹

We must, then, account for this striking change which has taken place in the English dramatic scene. Obviously the English drama received the force of a tremendous impact in the middle thirties, and this was the impact of Eliot on the English drama of his time. It was Eliot who, in Sweeney Agonistes and The Family Reunion brought the world for so long associated with the prose drama within the scope of poetry,² and it is to Eliot that Fry, Ridler, Spender, and Auden and Isherwood are more or less directly indebted for their poetic plays of modern life. It was Eliot who, in The Rock and Murder in the Cathedral, pointed the way to a religious drama in contact with contemporary thought and experience. Finally, it was

1. The Shadow Factory, Act II, Sc.3.

2. See Chap. III, pp.

Eliot who evolved a form of versification which might meet the demands of the twentieth century.¹ The value of his gift to the English drama of his time cannot be overestimated, and he has indeed "laid all his successors under obligation to him."²

1. See Chap. III, pp. 243 fl.

2. 'Poetry and Drama', p. 75.

CONCLUSION

In retrospect, we see that there has been a logical progression in the development of English drama in the first half of the twentieth century. The poetic drama of the nineteenth century was divorced almost entirely, both in choice and treatment of subject, from life itself. Jones and Pinero in England, and Ibsen in Norway, recognised the need to bring contemporary thought and experience, the world of actual existence, into the theatre. The heritage of Ibsen in England was a serious prose drama which passed through the hands of Shaw, Galsworthy, Harkin, Houghton, Brighouse, Baker and Sowerby, becoming increasingly more boldly realistic in its passage, and spending itself at last in the photographic naturalism which continues through Sheriff, Monkhouse, Bax to Emlyn Williams and Rattigan in the present day.

There was, however, a dangerous deficiency in the serious drama through which contemporary existence entered the theatre. The dramatists who followed Ibsen completely missed the poetry in his work, and the drama derived from him concerned itself almost exclusively

with the social problems and theories of its age, presented, as their subject matter demanded, in a form in which character, setting and language approximated as closely as possible to the world of everyday living.

The serious limitations of the new prose drama were immediately recognised, and the counter movement to bring poetry back to the stage was begun by the Irish dramatists and taken up by their English disciples, Abercrombie, Masefield and Drinkwater. Unfortunately, the poet dramatists did not immediately attempt to overcome their rivals on their own ground. Synge brought a vision of life itself to the stage, but it was a life remote from the world of modern society. The English poets made a valiant effort to revive verse as a medium for dramatic speech, but they, too, confined their efforts to subjects which yielded readily to poetic treatment. Meanwhile, the prose drama had completely taken over contemporary modern living, "the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre",¹ and this contemporary modern living had become firmly associated in the minds of the audience with the prose drama's photographic realism, and especially with its reproduction of everyday language. Poetry had become 'unnatural' in the theatre.

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', p.79.

The next step in this logical progress of development is obvious, but it is a step which the poet dramatists have not found easy to take. The contemporary audience had become so accustomed to the conventions of the prose drama in any play dealing with actual existence that it was not prepared to accept any attempt at its poetic presentation, especially if this presentation involved overt poetic utterance from characters in everyday dress and surroundings. It was T.S. Eliot who, in Sweeney Agonistes, and later in The Family Reunion, The Cocktail Party, and The Confidential Clerk succeeded in bringing poetry into the ordinary world in which the audience lives, and it is to Eliot's fusion of contemporary life and poetic vision that the poetic drama of the future must forever be indebted. Nevertheless, the path for Eliot was by no means easy. As we have illustrated from Eliot's own record of his experiences as a poet writing for the theatre, the dramatist has had a difficult struggle to overcome the prejudices of the modern audience. Eliot realised that poetry must be cautiously rehabilitated on the stage, and the poet who has re-instated it through the insidious rhythms of a verse which must, for the most part, allow its hearers to "forget that they are listening to a poetic play"¹

1. 'Comments on The Cocktail Party', p. 21.

has suffered the rigours of a long period of self discipline.

That Eliot has overcome the prejudice of audiences against poetic drama as far as his own work is concerned is certain. That he has altogether succeeded in effecting a "real dramatic renaissance"¹ is more doubtful. The drama written after Eliot has shown great courage and promise, but it is still experimental and uncertain. Contemporary dramatists have shown a marked timidity in following Eliot into the world of the commercial theatre, and what few attempts have been made at direct approach to contemporary living have been disappointing. Auden and Isherwood, Macniece and Spender have concerned themselves too keenly with the topical at the expense of the truly contemporary. The Shadow Factory, on the level of lesser intensity, is verse by courtesy alone, and the dramatist falls back on prose when she loses her nerve. However, in A Sleep of Prisoners and The House of Octopus a greater hope is held out to the future of contemporary drama. The dramatists after Eliot have mainly preferred to take their lead from The Rock and Murder in the Cathedral, and to present the world of everyday living by implication in their urgently

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama', (N.Y.H.T.) p.2, col.2.

contemporary treatment of material not obviously contemporary. Here they have been excellent, as is witnessed particularly by the religious drama of Fry and Williams, and there has indeed formed "a cluster of dramatists ... exhibiting a pattern of diversity and unity",¹ which, for Eliot, "would be a real dramatic renaissance".²

It is fitting that any critic of Eliot should look, finally, towards the future. The achievement of Eliot himself is very great. If the drama which follows him has, as yet, fallen short of this achievement, it has at least given evidence of pioneering sympathy with Eliot's own aims and ideals. Let us, with Eliot, continue to "regard our work today as that of the first generation only" and to endorse his "greatest hope ... that we shall lay some foundations upon which others will come to build."³

1. 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' (N.Y.H.T.) p.2, col.2.

2. op.cit.

3. op.cit.

SELECT BOOK-LIST

THE WORKS OF T.S.ELIOT

(a) DRAMATIC

- Sweeney Agonistes The Criterion, Vol.IV, No.IV,
October, 1926
Vol.V, No.1,
January, 1927.
(Faber and Faber) 1932
- The Rock (Faber and Faber) 1934
- Murder in the Cathedral (first completed. (Faber and Faber)
edition). June, 1935.
(second revised ed.)
January, 1936.
(third revised ed.)
August, 1937
(fourth revised ed.)
September, 1938.
- The Family Reunion (Faber and Faber) 1939.
- The Cocktail Party (first ed.) (Faber and Faber)
March, 1949.
(fourth (revised) impression)
September, 1950.

The Confidential Clerk (Faber and Faber) 1954.

(b) POETIC

Collected Poems, 1909-1935 (Faber and Faber) 1936.

Four Quartets (Faber and Faber) 1944.

(c) CRITICAL WORKS 1919-1953

(A chronological arrangement of Eliot's dramatic criticism, including separate volumes, collections, and contributions to books and periodicals)¹

'Some Notes on the Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe' Art and Letters, 11.4., Autumn 1919. (Selected Essays, 1951).

'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (I) Egoist, VI, 4, Sept/Oct. 1919. (Selected Essays, 1951).

'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (II) Egoist (VI, 5, Nov/Dec. 1919. (Selected Essays, 1951).

1. For the convenience of reference, footnotes are co-ordinated with reprints in collection of criticism, and, in each case, the reprint has been collated in the originals given in the chronological list.

- 'Ben Jonson' T.L.S. 930, Nov.13, 1919.
(Selected Essays, 1951)
- 'The Comedy of Humours' Athenaeum, 4672, Nov.14,
1919, (Selected Essays,
1951).
- 'The Duchess of Malfi at
the Lyric' Art and Letters, III, 1.
Winter, 1919/20.
- 'Euripides and Gilbert
Murray' Art and Letters, III, 2.
Spring 1920. (Selected
Essays, 1951)
- 'The Poetic Drama. A Review
of Cinnamon and Angelica, A
Play by John Middleton Murray'.
- 'Philip Massinger' T.L.S. 958, May 27, 1920.
(Selected Essays, 1951)
- 'The Old Comedy. A Review
of Philip Massinger by
A.H. Cruickshank'.
- The Sacred Wood (Methuen) 1920.
- 'The Possibility of a Poetic
Drama', Dial, LXIX.5, Nov.1920.
- 'Dramatis Personae' Criterion, I, 3. April,1923.
- 'The Beating of a Drum' Nation and Athenaeum, 1, Oct.6
1923. ^{XXXIV} _^
- 'Four Elizabethan Dramatists
I. A Preface'. Criterion, II, 6, Feb.1924.

- Homage to John Dryden (L. & V. Woolf) 1924.
- Introduction to Savonarola (R. Colden-Sanderson) 1926.
by Charlotte Eliot.
- Chilun
- "Review of 'All God's ~~Children~~ got Wings', 'Desire Under the Elms' and 'Welded' by Eugene O'Neill" Criterion IV, 2, April, 1926.
- 'A Study of Marlowe. Review of Christopher Marlowe by U.M. Ellis-Fermor'. T.L.S. 1309, March, 1927.
- 'Thomas Middleton' T.L.S. 1326, June, 30, 1927. (Selected Essays, 1951).
- 'Plays of Ben Jonson' T.L.S. 1329, July 21, 1927.
- Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca (O.U.P.) 1927.
- 'Stage Studies' T.L.S., 1349, Dec. 8, 1927.
- A Dialogue on Poetic Drama (Etchells and Macdonald) 1928, (Selected Essays 1951)
- Mr Lucas's Webster' Criterion VII. 4, June, 1928.
- 'The Oxford Jonson' Dial, 1. July, 1928.
LXXXV,
^
- 'A Review of "Elizabeth and Essex"' T.L.S., 1401, Dec. 6, 1928.

- Dante (Faber and Faber) 1929.
- Introduction to The Wheel of Fire by G. Wilson Knight. (O.U.P.) 1930.
- 'Cyril Tourneur' T.L.S., 1502, Nov. 13, 1930 (Selected Essays, 1951)
- 'John Dryden (I), The Poet' Listener, V, 113, April 15, 1931 (John Dryden, 1932)
- 'John Dryden (II) The Dramatist.' Listener, V, 119, April 22, 1931. (John Dryden, 1932)
- 'John Dryden (III), The Critic' Listener, V, 120. April 29, 1931 (John Dryden, 1932)
- 'Thomas Heywood' T.L.S., 1539. July 30, 1931 (Selected Essays, 1951)
- 'John Ford' T.L.S., 1579, May 5, 1932 (Selected Essays, 1951)
- John Dryden (T. & E. Holliday) 1932.
- Selected Essays (first ed.) (Faber and Faber) 1932.
- The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (Faber and Faber) 1933.
- After Strange Gods (Faber and Faber) 1934.

- 'The Rock. A Letter to the Editor' Spectator, 5528, June 8, 1934.
- 'John Marston' T.L.S., 1655, July 26, 1934, (Selected Essays, 131)
- 'Audiences, Producers, Plays, Poets' New Verse, 18 Dec. 1935.
- Essays Ancient and Modern (Faber and Faber) 1936.
- 'Mr. Murry's Shakespeare' Criterion, XV, 61, July 1936.
- 'The Need for Poetic Drama' Listener, XVI, 411, Nov. 25, 1936.
- 'Religious Drama. Medieval and Modern' University of Edinburgh Journal, IX, 1, Aug. 20, 1937.
- 'Five Points on Dramatic Writing' Townsman, I, 3, July 1938. (From a letter to Ezra Pound)
- 'The Poetry of W.B. Yeats' Purpose, XII, 3/4. July /Dec., 1940.
- 'The Duchess of Malfy' Listener, XXVI, 675, Dec. 18, 1941.
- Points of View (Faber and Faber) 1941.
- The Music of Poetry (Jackson, Glasgow) 1942.

- 'John Dryden's Tragedies' Listener, XXIX, 745,
April 22, 1943.
- Introduction to Shakespeare
and the Popular Dramatic
Tradition by S.L.Bethell (King and Staples) 1944.
- 'The Significance of Charles
Williams' Listener, XXXVI, 936,
Dec.19, 1946.
- 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' Adam, XVII, 200, Nov.1949.
- 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' Presidential Address to
the Poet's Theatre Guild
(private circulation)
- 'Reflections on The
Cocktail Party' World Review, Nov.1949.
- 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' New York Herald Tribune,
CIX, 37,681, Jan.15, 1950.
Section V, pp.1-2.
- 'Poetry and Drama',¹ Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXVII,
2, Feb. 1951, (Selected
Prose 1953)
- Selected Essays (third
enlarged ed.) (Faber and Faber) 1951

1. The first Theodore Spencer Memorial Lecture delivered at Harvard on Nov.21, 1950. This lecture is based, in part, on an earlier lecture delivered in 1949 and printed as 'The Aims of Poetic Drama' in Adam - (see supra)

- Poetry and Drama (Faber and Faber) 1951
- 'World Tribute to Bernard Shaw' Time and Tide, XXXII, 50, Dec. 15, 1951.
- Selected Prose (Penguin Books No.873) 1953.
- The Three Voices of Poetry (C.U.P.) 1953.

WORKS ON ELIOT

(a) SEPARATE VOLUMES

- Bodkin, M. The Quest for Salvation in an Ancient and a Modern Play. (O.U.P.) 1941.
- Bradbrook, M.C. T.S.Eliot, (Longmans, Green & Co.) 1950.
- Drew, E. T.S.Eliot; the Design of his Poetry (Eyre and Spottiswoode) 1950.
- Gallup, D. T.S.Eliot: A Biography (Faber and Faber) 1952
- Gardner, H. The Art of T.S.Eliot (Cresset Press) 1949.
- Grudin, L. Mr Eliot Among the Nightingales (Lawrence Drake) 1932.

- MacGreevy, T. Thomas Stearns Eliot. A Study. (Chatto and Windus) 1931.
- Matthiessen, F.O. The Achievement of T.S. Eliot. (O.U.P.) 1947.
- Maxwell, D.E.S. The Poetry of T.S. Eliot, (Routledge and Kegan Paul) 1952.
- Oxenford, M.A. murder in the Cathedral (Argentine Association of English Culture, English Pamphlet Series, No.2) (Buenos Aires) 1942.
- Partridge, A.C. T.S.Eliot (Publications of the University of Pretoria, ser.3, No.4)
- Passmore, J.A. T.S.Eliot (Sydney University Lit. Soc.) 1934.
- Rajan, B. (Ed.) T.S.Eliot. A Study of his Writings by Several Hands (Dennis Dobson) 1947.
- Robbins, R. The T.S. Eliot Myth (Henry Schuman) 1951.
- Rezzano, M.C. The Family Reunion (Argentine Association of English Culture, English Pamphlet Series, No.2) (Buenos Aires) 1942.

- Sansom, C. The Poetry of T.S.Eliot
(O.U.P.) 1947.
- Smidt, K. Poetry and Belief in the
Work of T.S.Eliot
(Jacob Dybwad) 1949.
- Stephenson, E.M. T.S. Eliot and the Lay
Reader (Fortune Press)
1944.
- Unger, L. (Ed.) T.S. Eliot: A Selected
Critique. (Reinehart) 1948.
- Williamson, H.R. The Poetry of T.S.Eliot
(Hodder and Stoughton) 1932
- Wilson, F. Six Essays on the Development
of T.S.Eliot, (Fortune Press)
1948.

(b) CRITICISM IN PERIODICALS¹

(The following periodical publications have been examined for criticism of the first production of each of Eliot's plays, of every subsequent revival, and of the publication of important volumes.)

Adelphi, Athenaeum, Criterion, Kenyon Review, Listener,
London Mercury, New Statesman and Nation, New York Herald
Tribune, New York Times, Observer, Poetry Review, Punch,
Scrutiny, Spectator, Sunday Times, Theatre Arts Monthly,
Times, Times Literary Supplement, Time and Tide.

1. The amount read is so great as to go far beyond the limits of a book-list such as this, and to list all the individual articles here is impossible. I have therefore confined myself merely to listing those periodicals which provided particularly interesting indications of the reaction to Eliot's plays.

CONTEMPORARY DRAMATISTS READ FOR PURPOSES OF COMPARISON¹

(a) DRAMATISTS WHOSE WORK FURNISHED INTERESTING MATTER FOR COMPARISON.

Anouilh, Baker, T., Barrie, Bax, Bennett, Binyon, Bridie, Brighouse, Claudel, Coward, Colum, Dane, Druten, Dukes, Ervine, Flecker, Galsworthy, Ghéon, Granville-Barker, Gregory, Harkin, Massall, Houghton, Housman, Ibsen, Jerome, Jones, H.A., Joyce, Lawrence, D.E., Lonsdale, Mackenzie, Maeterlinck, Martyn, Maugham, Moore, T.S., Monkhouse, Munro, Novello, Obey, O'Casey, O'Neill, Phillips, Phillpotts, Pinero, Priestley, Rattigan, Robinson, L., Rostand, Shaw, Sherriff, Smith, Dodie, Sowerby, Sutro, Ustinov, Wilder, T., Williams, Emlyn, Williams, Tennessee.

1. Since only those dramatists have been included whose work showed any sign of significant relationship to Eliot, this represents only a small number of the dramatists read.

(b) DRAMATISTS' MOST WORK IN GENERAL FURNISHED COMPARISON OF CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE.Abercrombie, Lascelles.

<u>Deborah</u>	(John Lane)	1912
<u>Four Short Plays</u> (The Adder; The Staircase; The Deserter; The End of the World).	(Martin Secker)	1922
<u>Phoenix</u>	(Martin Secker)	1923
<u>The Sale of Saint Thomas</u> (six acts)	(Martin Secker)	1931

Auden, W.H.

<u>The Dance of Death</u>	(Faber and Faber)	1933
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Auden, J.H. and Isherwood, C.

<u>The Dog Beneath the Skin</u>	(Faber and Faber)	1935
<u>The Ascent of F.6.</u>	(Faber and Faber)	1937
<u>On the Frontier</u>	(Faber and Faber)	1938

Bottomley, Gordon

<u>King Lear's Wife</u> [<u>The Crier by Night</u> , <u>The Riding to Lithend</u> , <u>Midsummer Eve</u> , <u>Laodice and Danaë</u>]	(Constable)	1920
<u>Gruach and Britain's Daughter</u>	(Constable)	1921.
<u>The Acts of Saint Peter</u>	(Constable)	1933

Drinkwater, John

- Cophetua (David Nutt) 1911
Rebellion (David Nutt) 1914
Pawns (The Storm; The God of Quiet; $X = 0$) (Sidgwick and Jackson) 1917
Abraham Lincoln (Sidgwick and Jackson) 1918
Mary Stuart (Sidgwick and Jackson) 1921
Oliver Cromwell (Sidgwick and Jackson) 1921
Robert E. Lee (Sidgwick and Jackson) 1923
Robert Burns (Sidgwick and Jackson) 1925
Midsummer Eve (Sidgwick and Jackson) 1932
A Man's House (Sidgwick and Jackson) 1934
Garibaldi (Sidgwick and Jackson) 1936

Duncan, Ronald

- The Dull Ass's Hoof (Fortune Press) 1940
This Way to the Tomb (Faber and Faber) 1946
Stratton (Faber and Faber) 1950
Our Lady's Tumbler (Faber and Faber) 1951
Don Juan (Faber and Faber) 1954

Fry, Christopher

- The Boy with a Cart (O.U.P.) 1939
A Phoenix Too Frequent (Hollis and Carter) 1946
The Firstborn (University Press: Cambridge) 1946

Fry (contd.)

- Thor, with Angels (O.U.P.) 1949
The Lady's Not for Burning (O.U.P.) 1949
Venus Observed (O.U.P.) 1950
A Sleep of Prisoners (O.U.P.) 1951
The Dark is Light Enough (O.U.P.) 1954

Gittings, Robert

- The Makers of Violence (William Heinemann) 1951

Hardy, Thomas

- The Dynasts (Macmillan) 1910

Macneice, Louis

- Out of the Picture (Faber and Faber) 1937
Christopher Columbus (Faber and Faber) 1944
The Dark Tower, and other
 radio scripts (Faber and Faber) 1947

Masefield, John

- The Tragedy of Nan and
 Other Plays (Grant Richards) 1909
The Tragedy of Tompey the
 Great (Sidgwick and Jackson) 1910
The Faithful (William Heinemann) 1918
Good Friday (Macmillan) 1916
The Locked Christ and the
 Sweeps of '98 (Letchworth Garden City
 Press) 1916
A King's Daughter (Macmillan) 1923

Masefield (contd.)

<u>The Trial of Jesus</u>	(William Heinemann) 1925
<u>Tristan and Isolt</u>	(William Heinemann) 1925
<u>The Coming of Christ</u>	(Macmillan) 1928
<u>Easter</u>	(Macmillan) 1929
<u>End and Beginning</u>	(William Heinemann) 1933
<u>A Play of Saint George</u>	(William Heinemann) 1948

Nicholson, Norman

<u>The Old Man of the Mountains</u>	(Faber and Faber) 1946
<u>Prophecy to the Wind</u>	(Faber and Faber) 1950

Ridler, Anne

<u>Cain</u>	(Nicholson and Watson) 1943
<u>The Shadow Factory</u>	(Faber and Faber) 1946
<u>Henry Bly, and Other Plays</u>	(Faber and Faber) 1950

Sayers, Dorothy L.

<u>The Man Born to be King</u>	(Victor Gollancz) 1943
<u>Four Sacred Plays</u>	(Victor Gollancz) 1948
<u>(The Zeal of Thy House; The Devil to Pay; He That Should Come; The Just Vengeance).</u>	
<u>The Emperor Constantine</u>	(Victor Gollancz) 1951

Spender, Stephen

Trial of a Judge (Faber and Faber) 1938

Synge, John Millington

Collected Plays (Penguin Books. No.845) 1952.
 [The Shadow of the Glen,
Riders to the Sea, The
Well of Saints, The
Tinker's Wedding, The
Playboy of the Western
World, Deirdre.]

Williams, Charles

Three Plays (The Witch;
The Chaste Wanton; The
Rite of the Passion.) (O.U.P.) 1931

Thomas Cranmer of Can-
terbury. (O.U.P.) 1936.

Judgment at Chelmsford (O.U.P.) 1939

The House of Octopus (Edinburgh House Press) 1945

Seed of Adam and Other
Plays (The Death of
Good Fortune; The House
by the Stable; Grab and Grace.) (O.U.P.) 1948

Yeats, William Butler

Collected Plays (Macmillan) 1952
 [The Countess Cathleen(1892),
The Land of Heart's Desire
(1894), Cathleen Ni Houlihan
(1902), The Pot of Broth
(1904), The King's Threshold
(1904), The Shadowy Waters(1911),
Deirdre (1907), At The Hawk's
Well (1917), The Green Helmet
(1910), On Bailis Strand (1904),

Yeats (contd.)

The Only Jealousy of Emer
 (1919), The Hour-Glass (1914),
The Unicorn From the Stars
 (1908), The Player Queen
 (1922), The Dreaming of the
Bones (1919), Calvary (1920),
The Cat and the Loon (1926),
The Resurrection (1931)
The Words upon the Window-pane
 (1934), A Full Moon in March (1935)
The King of the Great Clock Tower
 (1935), The Herne's Egg (1938),
Purgatory (1939), The Death of
Cuchulain (1939)]

CRITICAL THEORYAbercrombie, Lascelles

- Thomas Hardy, A Critical Study (Martin Secker) 1912
 'The Function of Poetry in the
 Drama' Poetry Review,
 March, 1912.
 See English Critical Essays.
Twentieth Century, ed. P. F.
 Jones. (O.U.P.) 1933
- Speculative Dialogues (Martin Secker) 1913
- Poetry and Contemporary Speech Pamphlet 27, Feb. 1914,
 of the English
 Association. (O.U.P.)
- The Epic (Martin Secker) 1914

(Abercrombie contd.)

- An Essay Towards A Theory of Art (Martin Becker) 1922
- The Theory of Poetry (Martin Becker) 1924
- The Idea of Great Poetry (Martin Becker) 1924
- Poetry, Its Music and Meaning (O.U.P.) 1932

Drinkwater, John

- Introduction to St. John Mankin. Collected Plays. (Martin Becker, 1923)
- The Gentle Art of Theatre-Going (Robert Holden) 1927

Fry, Christopher

- 'When Poets Write Plays' (New Theatre, Vol.4.No.9. March, 1948)
- 'The Contemporary Theatre. A Playwright Speaks' Listener, Feb.23,1950.
- 'Poetry and the Theatre'; Adam, International Review, 1951, ~~p.8~~
- Granville-Barker, H.
- On Dramatic Method (Sidgwick) 1931
- The Study of Drama (C.U.P.) 1934
- On Poetry in Drama (Sidgwick) 1937

Hassall, Christopher

- Notes on the Verse Drama (The Curtain Press) 1948

Jones, H.A.

- 'Religion and the Stage' The Nineteenth Century Review, 1885
- See Appendix to Saints and Sinners (Macmillan) 1891

Masefield, John

- Preface to the Tragedy of Hamlet (Grant Richards) 1911
SHAKESPEARE (WILLIAMS & NORWICH) 1911
New Chum (autobiography) (William Heinemann) 1944
RECENT PROSE (WILLIAM HEINEMANN) 1924
So Long to Learn (autobiography) (William Heinemann) 1952

Yeats, William Butler

- Discoveries (Dun Emer Press) 1907
The Cutting of an Agate (Macmillan) 1919
Plays and Controversies (Macmillan) 1923
The Death of Synge (Cuala Press) 1928
Dramatis Personae (Macmillan) 1936

GENERAL SURVEYS

- Bentley, E. The Modern Theatre, (Robert Hale) 1948
- Browne, E. Martin 'The Poet in the English Theatre' Poetry Review, Vol. XXXIX, No. 4.
- Cuncliffe, G.W. Modern English Playwrights, A Short History of English Drama from 1825 (Harrap) 1925
- Ellis-Fermor, U.M. The Irish Dramatic Movement (Methuen) 1939
- Findlater, R. The Unholy Trade, (Victor Gollancz) 1952

- Greenwood, Ormerod The Playwright (Pitman) 1950
- Hartnell, W. The Oxford Companion to the Theatre (O.U.P.) 1951
- Hudson, L. The Twentieth Century Drama (Harrap) 1946
- Isaacs, J. An Assessment of Twentieth Century Literature (Secker and Warburg) 1951
- Nicholson, H. Man and Literature (S.C.M. Press) 1943
- Nicoll, A. British Drama (Harrap) 1947
- Nicoll, A. World Drama from Aeschylus to Anouilh (Harrap) 1949
- Paige, D.D. The Letters of Ezra Pound (Faber and Faber) 1951
- Teacock, R. The Poet in the Theatre (Routledge) 1946
- Poetry Review 'Recent Poetry and Drama', Vol. XXXIII, No. 1., March-April 1942
- Poetry Review 'The Poetic Drama', Vol. XXXV, No. 1., Jan-Feb. 1944
- Poetry Review 'Poetic Drama Competition Award', Vol. XXXVII, No. 1. April-May, 1946.

- Thouless, D. Modern Poetic Drama, (Blackwell)
1934
- Times Literary Supplement 'Modern Poetic Drama', No.1,686
May 24th, 1934
- Times Literary Supplement 'New Poetic Drama', No.1,721
Jan.24, 1935
- Trewin, J.C. Drama, 1945-1950 (Longmans, Green
& Co.) 1951
- Trewin, J.C. The Theatre Since 1900 (Dakers)
1951
- Trewin, J.C. Dramatists of Today (Staples) 1953
- Williams, R. Drama from Ibsen to Eliot
(Chatto and Windus) 1952