

## THE ESSENCE OF T. S. ELIOT'S THEORY OF POETIC DRAMA

HARUMA OKADA

T. S. エリオットの詩劇論の本質

岡田春馬

I am going to study the essence of T. S. Eliot's theory of poetic drama critically according to my view of drama by analyzing the theory of poetic drama which he advocated in *A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry* and *Poetry and Drama* which are of great importance as the main literatures which Eliot, as a playwright, wrote himself. The former was published as the limited edition from the publishing company of Frederick Etchell and Macdonald, which was added as the preface of *An Essay of Dramatic Poetry* by Dryden. The latter was published as the memorial lecture to Theodore Spenser at Harvard University in November 1950.

Eliot represented much respect toward Dryden. He inherited, criticized, and developed the Dryden's theory of poetic drama, and established the literary basis of the theory and practice of English poetic drama in the 20th century.

The most important thing that we must keep in mind is that Eliot's theory of poetic drama was written upon the literary position as a poet and critic.

Therefore he applied his poetic method and critical method to his poetic dramas. According to my view we can not appreciate his poetic dramas without the knowledge of his poetic method and critical method.

Now I am going to study Eliot's theory of poetic drama referring to his poetic and critical method.

In my view the most fundamental theory of poetic drama that Eliot advocated, is the complete unity of poetry and drama. I am going to explain this unity in detail. Poetry and drama are not two different things but make a new world of poetic drama when they are united together completely. Eliot tried to avoid the isolation of poetry from drama. Based upon this theory of poetic drama, Eliot thinks that if we isolate poetry from drama completely we can not have the right to say that Shakespeare was a greater dramatist than Ibsen. But I cannot agree to this opinion of Eliot's about Shakespeare and Ibsen. Though I admit there is no poetry in Ibsen's plays yet Ibsen's plays attract me dramatically. But I can not deny the dramatic talent of Shakespeare. For, when I saw *The Merchant of Venice*, produced on the stage by Japanese actors I took much dramatic interest in this play.

Now the complete unity of poetry and drama which is the most fundamental theory of poetic drama which Eliot advocated comes up from the literary insistence that great poetry is dramatic. According to my theory of poetry and drama there exists dramatic element as latent existence in great poetry, and moreover there exists poetic element as

latent existence in great drama likewise. Based upon this theory of poetry and drama I am sure that poetry and drama have the inseparable connection with each other essentially. For, Homer and Dante who are great poets are more dramatic than any other literary person.

We can say the same thing about tragedy and comedy. For, there exists the comical element in tragedy and tragical element in comedy. Now all contemporary plays are all tragedy. But in my view of drama tragedy is not always sad and sorrowful play, but the representation of meditation and its solution toward human sufferings and death.

Now what makes drama most dramatic is what makes drama most poetic. This is one of the theories of poetic drama that Eliot advocated. This theory is closely connected with the literary insistence that great poetry is dramatic. No one has ever pointed out that some of Shakespeare's plays are most poetic and on the other hand some of Shakespeare's plays are most dramatic. This shows that the same play is most poetic and at the same time most dramatic.

That the same plays are most poetic and most dramatic is not by a concurrence of two activities which are poetic activities and dramatic activities, but by the complete explanation of one activity in which poetic activities and dramatic activities are fully united together.

In short there is no connection between poetry and drama. All poetry tends toward drama, all drama tends towards poetry. Our desire of poetic drama which will last forever must exist in our human nature potentially and intuitively.

Blank verse was the literary vehicle which Elizabethan poets and dramatists used with much satisfaction but this blank verse is not the proper vehicle to the contemporary poets and dramatists. For the literary vehicle of blank verse has been too much abused and has lost the proper value. Accordingly Eliot who was keenly conscious of the deficiency of blank verse was compelled to find out the new proper form of rhythm which would satisfy contemporary poets and dramatists. This very discovery of the new form of rhythm is one of the most important concerns which Eliot had.

According to his view of drama, a truly new dramatic world which is beyond the mere poetic world and the mere dramatic world will come out by the complete unity and fusion of the poetic and the dramatic elements. In my view the notion of the new dramatic world comes out from Eliot's notion of the poetic world. Eliot creates a new poetic world by gathering many poetic images from the traditional literature in Europe. Therefore there is not always the direct connection between the poetic works and the world of the poet's life and feelings.

Based upon this literary view Eliot insists that the honest criticism and keen appreciation must not be done about poets, but about the poetry in *The Sacred Wood*. In my view this literary attitude of Eliot's toward poetry shows clearly his traditional attitude toward literature. Therefore in order to appreciate the new poetic world we must not appreciate it in the comparison with our world of real experience in this world, but we must appreciate the new poetic world as the new poetic world. This method and attitude of the literary appreciation of poetry demand a lot of wide and profound knowledge

of classical literature in Europe. Without this knowledge, we can not appreciate Eliot's poetry in the true sense of appreciation. Bradbrook is wrong in saying that she can understand Eliot's poetry by the contextual meaning of poetry without knowing the allusions to the classical literature in Europe.

We can say the same thing about the new dramatic world which Eliot created in his poetic drama. Therefore just like the case of the new poetic world, we must appreciate the new dramatic world as the new dramatic world without comparing it with our world of real experiences in this world. I am sure this method of literary appreciation is the just and proper method of appreciation of Eliot's poetic drama.

The following insistence of Eliot's that "if our verse is to have so wide range that it can say anything that has to be said, it follows that it will not be 'poetry' all the time. It will only be 'poetry' 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" is one of the most important insistence about the unity of poetry and drama. According to this view of poetic drama, poetry exists as latent and sleeping existence in drama.

And when dramatic situation becomes most intense, poetry becomes potential existence in drama. Eliot aims at a form of verse in which every thing that must be said can be said. Therefore when he finds some situation which can not be dealt with in verse, he thinks that the form of verse lacks flexibility. And if he finds some scene which he can not express in verse, he must either develop his verse, or avoid introducing such scenes. For he thinks that he must accustom his audience to verse to the point at which they will stop being conscious of it. For if he introduces prose dialogue, it would only result in distracting their attention from the play itself to the medium of its expression.

Eliot advocates that the chief effect of style and rhythm in dramatic speech, whether in prose or verse, should be unconscious in *Poetry and Drama* (p. 13). According to this view, it must be very unfortunate if the audience would enjoy the plot and language of the play as the two different things. This advocacy is the Eliot's consistent and fundamental opinion in the theory of poetic drama. It is quite natural that based upon this fundamental opinion, Eliot thinks that the mixture of prose and verse in the same play should generally be avoided. For the audience suddenly become conscious of the medium of expression in dramatic speech every time characters in the play change the prose expression into verse expression or verse expression into prose expression. But Eliot thinks that this mixture of prose and verse in the same play could be justified when dramatists would achieve the dramatic contrast by the mixture of prose and verse. That is, this could be done when dramatists would transport the audience suddenly and violently from one world of reality to another world of reality. Considering that some of prose expressions in Shakespeare's plays are made with the view of achieving this dramatic effect of contrast, Eliot thinks that the sound of knocking the doors in *Macbeth* as the best example that everybody can think of.

And he thinks that the alternative use of scene in prose and scene in verse in *Henry*

IV shows the dramatic effect of the sarcastic contrast between the world of high politics and the world of everyday life.

In my view of drama, it is mainly due to the fact that the Elizabethan audience had so shrewd a dramatic sensibility toward prose and verse that Shakespeare could achieve this dramatic effect of contrast. For they could hear the prose and verse expression quite naturally, liked the mixture of the bombastic language and the low and comical language in the same play and thought that mean characters speak the mean language and the noble characters in the high position speak the bombastic language. The poetic drama is the most familiar literary form to them, for they had many opportunities of hearing poetic dramas since childhood. But in the history of English drama, poetic drama had gone on the decaying way since Dryden. Therefore we can not expect such dramatic sensibility from the contemporary audience, as the Elizabethan audience had. Based upon this view of literature, the mixture of prose and verse in the same play would hinder the just and proper appreciation of poetic drama by the contemporary audience, who are conscious of the mixture of prose and verse to the remarkable extent. Therefore he insists upon the avoidance of the mixture of verse and prose. That is, he insists that lest he should make the audience be conscious that they are hearing verse at one time and prose at another time, he must write the most commonplace part of verse play in verse. For if he could succeed in this he could make a dramatic effect upon the audience.

Eliot quotes and praises the 22 lines of the opening scene as the best example of theory of poetic drama that has been written.

In Eliot's view of drama, what we do not notice when we see this scene is the great change of style. There is nothing superfluous in these 22 lines. There is nothing which can't be justified by the dramatic value. Shakespeare must have studied for a long time until he could write these 22 lines. For we can't find the lines so great and wonderful as the 22 lines of the opening scene of *Hamlet*. At first Shakespeare developed the colloquial and conversational verse in the monologues of characters, for instance Falconbridge of *King John* and the nurse of *Romeo and Juliet*, it is not easy to introduce the colloquial and conversational verse into the short dialogue without any obstruction. Therefore any dramatist can not be said to have mastered the poetic drama until he can write such the transparent lines as the 22 lines of the opening scene of *Hamlet*. Therefore the ability of dramatists depends upon whether they could write such transparent lines. The audience who are hearing this transparent lines are not hearing poetry but paying attention to the sense of poetry consciously.

These 22 lines are the great poetry and at the same time dramatic. Moreover, there is something that is beyond the poetic and the dramatic element. It is a kind of musical design. The movement of our feelings are quickened or arrested by it without our knowing it. I mean by saying something that is beyond the poetic and dramatic element that actors do not make the mere representation of reality, but look at themselves in the truly dramatic world obtaining objectivity by being independent of the subjectivity of the dramatist by performing the given functions.

In short it is the world of art in which individuality can be expressed through the impersonification. In my view this kind of expression agrees to the spirit of modern art which is becoming abstractive more and more.

The plays of Shakespeare which constitute the great symphony by describing all kinds of human nature are very impersonal. Therefore this very impersonification represents the foundation of human beings. Eliot's literary utterance that "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality", is nothing but the insistence of impersonality in literature. According to this view, absolute art is impersonal, and the human world of real life and the artistic world of the literary works which art constitutes are quite different.

At any rate we can see the wonderful traces of artistic struggle in transforming the personal feelings of private sufferings in the real life into something rich, impersonal and universal in Eliot's poetry and poetic drama.

The despair which is the mother of the wonderful poetry and poetic drama becomes impersonal in the artistic world of surrealism of poetry and poetic drama.

According to my view of literature, the world of literary works is not composed of a lot of ideas, emotions, feelings, perception and desires which we have in the real world but is well arranged orderly in some literary form. Therefore poetry and poetic drama should be transformed until they become something impersonal. The case of Eliot's poetry and poetic drama, the very way combination of many images, feelings, emotions, thoughts and perceptions is impersonal. The world of poetic drama came out through this way Eliot's of impersonification.

The world of literary creation is independent of the world of human experiences. But it can not be denied that the world of literary creation implies the world of human experiences. But we must distinguish the artistically, literally inner experiences from the human experiences in this real world.

The literary and artistic experiences of one person are quite different from those of another person. Therefore we must appreciate the emotion expressed in poetry and poetic drama not as the personal emotion, but as the emotion which springs up from the world of poetry and drama. It seems to me that Eliot's literary insistence that the emotion of art is impersonal shows this theory of literature.

In my view, the main reason why it is so difficult for us to appreciate the Eliot's poetry and poetic drama is that they are not obscure in the individual thoughts, but the literary and artistic connection of one poetic thought with another one is obscure for us. Therefore in order to appreciate these kinds of poetry and poetic drama, we should appreciate only the artistic world of poetic thought expressed in his poetry and poetic drama and should not understand them in the comparison with the world of our daily experiences. This is the only and best method of appreciating them. Above all, the most difficult elements of his poetry and poetic drama are the allusions and parody.

The artistic transformation of personality into something impersonal and universal is closely connected with his traditional attitude towards literature.

Eliot sought for the foundation of literature in the European literature of a long tradition. Traditionalism means that a literary person increases his own literary value by adding what the preceding literary persons lacked to his own literary works. For however Shakespeare may be great, contemporary poets know what Shakespeare did not know. Based upon this traditionalism towards literature, Eliot adopted the multiplied images in poetry and poetic drama. He combined the old poetic images with the new poetic images in the artistic world of poetry and poetic drama, so that he achieved the wonderful poetic and poetic-dramatic effect. He got the harmony of unharmony by combining the different poetic images which have no direct and indirect connection with each other and are opposed to each other. And this literary and artistic method of the combination is the characteristics of Eliot's wonderful literary talent which is based upon traditionalism.

Now, the tradition that Eliot makes much of is the tradition of European literature, that is to say, the literary heritage which has been inherited from the classical literature of Greek and Rome. Eliot does not regard tradition as the past existence, that is, the static existence, but as the kinetic existence which holds its lively life in a new literary order. This is the characteristics of Eliot's traditionalism. Literary tradition, though it is the traditional heritage of the past literature, lives in the present order. This is what Eliot calls "historical sense." This consciousness of tradition is the most important element that puts the chaotic disorder in order, which sprang up from the direct representation and insistence of individuality, and moreover, makes the world of unity and harmony. Accordingly, it is the critic's business to make constant efforts to maintain and develop tradition. And poets must make efforts to live in tradition.

Traditionalism being the foundation of Eliot's theory of poetry, criticism and poetic drama, we can not understand his literature without the knowledge of this traditionalism. Eliot, being based upon this theory, insisted upon the artificiality of dramatic word. According to Eliot's literary view, all dramatic expression is artificial. And we are to deceive ourselves when we aim at realism. For human beings have not changed so much since the times of Aeschylus. He says, "On the stage, prose is artificial like verse and verse can be natural like prose." (*Poetry and Drama* p. 13.) Though he says, "Prose drama is merely a slight by-product of verse drama. The human soul, in intense emotions to express itself in verse" (*A Dialogue on Dramatic poetry* p. 99) yet, it seems to me that this literary insistence lacks validity. For Eliot himself says, "Whether we use prose or verse on the stage, they are both but to an end." (*Poetry and Drama* p. 12.) In my view, Eliot means the object of achieving the dramatic effect upon the audience by saying "an end." And he thinks that it is not his business but neurologist's business to discover why the human mind strives to express itself in verse when the human feelings become intense, and why and how human emotions are closely connected with rhythm. But in my view, the connection of human feelings with rhythm is the intuitional one. By the way rhythm is the methodical movement of sound, which is closely connected with the notion of unity. Therefore Eliot's insistence that human mind, when it becomes intense, strives to express itself shows that Eliot strives to get the artistic and musical

unity by writing drama in verse.

In my view this very unity is what Eliot always seeks for in literature. For Eliot thinks that it is nothing but this very unity that can save the mental destruction in Europe which was brought by World War I. That is to say, he thinks that we can restore the mental unity by expressing ourselves in verse. Therefore this very unity is the fundamental notion of Eliot's literature, from which many literary ideas spring up. By connecting the notion of unity in literature with the theory of music, Eliot became conscious of the necessity of expressing in verse. According to my view of music, what music seeks for is nothing but unity and harmony. When we hear music which has the proper rhythm, we feel our minds united. Eliot who insists upon the necessity of verse expression which would give human minds and emotions the notion of unity, by which we human beings would restore the mental balances which were destroyed completely by the war, thinks that poetry is not necessary if poetry is mere embellishment and additional modification and gives the persons having the literary taste the literary joy of hearing poetry, while they are seeing poetic drama. This seems to be quite a natural theory for a man who is keenly conscious of the necessity of verse expression. Therefore poetry must be justified dramatically and transformed into the dramatic forms. According to Eliot's view of drama, whether dramatists use verse or prose on the stage, it must be nothing but the means by which dramatic effect upon the audience could be achieved. The difference between verse and prose may not be so large as we think according to some literary views. For the prose which the characters speak in the prose plays which would be read or produced on the stage by the later generations are remote from the rhythm and syntax of the everyday words which we use in the real life and at the same time artificial like the words expressed in verse plays. That is to say, if the words which are used in plays are near those of our daily conversation in our real world, the range, width and height of the words would be limited very narrowly and so lose artistic universality and artificiality.

Now I am going to study the main reason why Dryden supported the literary value of rhyme in the literary discussion with Howard. According to his literary opinion, blank verse being "measured prose" like prose, though it is called poetry, it is too mean and too near the colloquial expression as the literary form of expression in which the noble and sublime subject-matters are expressed. We must not reexpress the colloquial conversation of our daily life on the stage. We must distinguish dramatic words on the stage from the colloquial conversation of our daily life and must use the words which have the more artistic range and width than the colloquial words. The world of rhyme consists in this. Though it seems that the natural and the artificial thing contradict each other, and the contradiction becomes the obstruction of versification, yet poetry could deepen objectivity and artistic artificiality all the more for the obstruction. These are the main reasons why Dryden supported the literary value of rhyme. It seems to me that Eliot agrees to this defensive theory of rhyme. For he insists that all dramatic words are artificial and consequently, the artistic universality, objectivity and artificiality are

heightened by the artificiality of the dramatic words, too. Behind his insistence of the artificiality of dramatic words, there exists his traditionalism, and the theory of criticism in literature, in which Eliot strives to contribute English poetic drama to the traditional culture of European literature. This very traditionalism is the fundamental attitude toward literature which Eliot has taken all through his literary activities. Therefore we can not understand his insistence of the artificiality of dramatic words without the knowledge of his traditionalism. In my view, Eliot's insistence of the artificiality of dramatic words shows his surrealist attitude toward literature. Eliot denies the contemporary realism in literature as the negative element which hinders the artistic progress of literature standing upon his literary position of surrealism. My literary attitude is favourable to surrealism. For I think that the recordal and photographic elements of realism destroy the pure essence of literature and the artificiality of art. And realistic literature is confined to the limited range of reality and will lose the literary possibility of the further development. And moreover, realistic literature makes little of the literary importance of fancy and imagination which is the essential element of literature. But I do not quite agree to Eliot's surrealism in all respects. For his theory of surrealism is too excessive in some cases. Of course, I admit that it is quite natural that he should take such excessive attitude toward literature, for he adopted the literary attitude of surrealism as the literary resistance to the contemporary realistic tendency of literature. But there are some problems in his insistence of the artificiality of dramatic word. For I am afraid that he should make little of the literature for life by making too much of the traditionalism of literature and the artificiality of art. He seems to make little of the true and proper significance of literature by making too much of the tradition of European literature of a long tradition.

The nearer a dramatic work gets to the real life, the larger the difference between one actor's production and another actor's production becomes, and at last the difference between one generation's production and another generation's production. That is, a dramatic work is limited by the personal and humanistic interpretations of individual actors, and will lose the artistic universality, eternity of art. Therefore the dramatic development of modern realism has diverted from the artistic and concrete process of proper drama.

As Eliot advocates the necessity of the dramatic convention, I am going to express my view about this. Art is not life. The existence of art becomes possible when our human minds give convention to our real life. I do not mean by saying convention the fixed form of the subject-matter, artistic method, form of verse, mode of drama, view of life and world which is at the back of a literary work, but the artistic form of constituting art as art, artistic method of dramatic constitution, the choice which is given to the world of human action, and rhythm. Therefore it may be quite all right when it is quite new.

Eliot insists in *Rhetoric and Poetic Dramas* that rhetoric is the indispensable element to poetic drama. There exists a truly dramatic element in rhetoric indeed. Rhetoric may



have the truly dramatic value when the characters in the play support their dramatic importance, gaining their own objectivity by being independent of the subjectivity of the playwrights. This dramatic importance is one of the most important elements that modern realistic dramas lack. Therefore we must appreciate the rhetoric of substance rightly. Eliot expresses the same idea, using the word "self-dramatization" in the paper of *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca*. A kind of self-defense and self-praise of the heroine just before his destruction is made to people who surround him in the dramatic form of self-dramatization. This dramatic notion of self-dramatization is closely connected with stoicism. According to Eliot's definition of stoicism, stoicism is the refuge where human beings hide themselves, and are indifferent to themselves or have hostility against themselves. This is the passing comfort with which human beings comfort themselves even at the tragical moment. This is a kind of aesthetic attitude with which human beings strive to dramatize themselves and heroize themselves just before the tragical moment of death. The true tragedy of human beings is that they can not get out from the tragical condition for ever. I am sure that self-dramatization is the intuitional element of human beings. Therefore they strive to dramatize themselves intuitionally however they may be driven to any tragical condition.